



BLUE AND GRAY WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1904 by Frank Tousey, 24 Union Square, New York.

No. 8.

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 30, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

BIVOUAC AND BATTLE!

OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY'S HARD CAMPAIGN.

By LIEUT. HARRY LEE.



For a moment the gray line wavered. But Will Prentiss, sword uplifted, leaped upon the breastwork. "Forward, Virginia Grays!" he shouted. His brave example turned the tide of battle.

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CHAPTER I.

A DARING ENTERPRISE.

"Ah, Captain Prentiss, I am glad to see you. Pray have a chair. You have answered my summons promptly."

General Beauregard, the famous commander of the Confederate forces at Manassas at the outbreak of the great Civil War, gripped the handsome young officer's hand and indicated a seat.

Will Prentiss, one of Richmond's most brilliant youths and brave as he was handsome, bowed and replied:

"You sent for me, general. It was my duty to respond. I have come prepared to accept the commission of which you speak as being so dangerous. My company is ready and eager for the field."

"That is the sort of talk I like," declared the great general as he spread a map on his table. At the tent entrance was an orderly, to whom he said:

"Send Peterson, the scout, here. I want his opinion."

Will Prentiss seated himself. He had ridden that day twenty miles in answer to a call from Beauregard.

Captain Prentiss was the chief officer of a brilliant company of youths from Richmond and other towns in Vir-

ginia. They had banded themselves together as volunteers to fight for the Confederacy.

They styled themselves the Virginia Grays. The first lieutenant was Fred Randolph, son of a wealthy man in Richmond. The second lieutenant was Dick Walton.

The Grays had distinguished themselves at Ball's Bluff and other places and won fame and distinction.

So, when General Beauregard bethought himself of a certain campaign for a single company he decided upon the Grays as the best and bravest.

At once he proceeded to explain to Will the substance of this campaign.

"The work I want you to do is most dangerous and difficult," he said. "I have just received word that a regiment of Union troops under the command of Colonel Sam Benson has had the audacity to make a dash from Alexandria and has captured one of our supply trains at Walker's Ferry, on the Occoquan Creek."

"Now reinforcements are within Benson's call. At the present moment a movement north of here requires the attention of all my spare regiments. You will be outnumbered, but I think if you can march south and cross the Occoquan Creek below the ferry you can drive Benson back into a trap which I shall hold ready for him.

"It is a dangerous expedition, Prentiss, and if you don't

feel like taking the chances or sacrificing your boys I will send some one else."

General Beauregard looked questioningly at Will. But the young captain made reply:

"You will honor us greatly by letting us undertake this expedition," he said. "Danger will not deter us."

The general's face lit up.

"Very good! I am pleased!" he said. "I know you are the best fitted to carry out the enterprise. Ah, now we shall have more light on the subject!"

Peterson, the scout, had just entered the tent. He was noted as one of the shrewdest spies and scouts in the employ of the Confederacy.

He was a tall thin man with a shrewd face. In fact, he was of the mountaineer class of North Carolina, and before the war had been noted as a desperado or "bad man."

But that Peterson was devoted to the Confederacy there was no doubt. He was much trusted by Beauregard.

"Peterson," said the general sharply, "I will introduce you to Captain Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays."

"Glad to know Prentiss," said Peterson. "I have heard much about him."

"And I am glad to know you," said Will genially. "General Beauregard tells me that you can explain this expedition to Walker's Ferry."

"Well," said Peterson, "there is not much to explain. Benson is making a raid along the Occoquan. The planters are kicking hard because no relief is sent them."

"Relief!" said Beauregard sharply. "How can we send them relief? As soon as Benson is attacked he falls back. He is as slippery as a weasel. The only way I know of to settle him is to throw some small force between him and Alexandria and thus drive him back into our arms here."

"Have you counted the risk of such a thing?" asked Peterson.

"What do you consider the risk?"

"Why, such a detachment must practically expose itself to a rear attack from any force back of Benson at present. It would mean walking into a trap. I would counsel that the force be large enough to outnumber Benson and make a quick job of it."

"I disagree with you," said Beauregard. "A heavy body of men would be at once detected and McClellan would rush heavy reinforcements in. A small body of men can handle themselves more quickly, and in case of a rear attack could more easily extricate themselves."

"I think you are right, General Beauregard," said Will. "A very small demonstration in the rear of a regiment is all that is necessary usually to throw it into a state of panic."

"I yield," said Peterson with a laugh. "I can see that the majority is against me. But how large a force do you contemplate sending, general?"

"I shall send the Virginia Grays."

"What? A single company?"

"Yes."

The scout whistled softly.

"I give you credit for great courage, Captain Prentiss,"

he said, "but at the same time I wish you the greatest of success."

"Very good!" said General Beauregard. "I want you, Peterson, to accompany Prentiss and his Grays on this expedition."

"I am under your orders, general."

"Very good! You know this region well. Lead the Grays by the safest route to the rear of Benson's regiment. Make no mistake and fail not."

"Very well, sir."

Will and the scout looked at each other. They gripped hands, and Will said:

"My men are twenty miles to the north. I shall march them down here, and if you wish you can wait for me here."

"Very well, captain," said the scout.

"Then everything is understood?" asked Beauregard. "You both know what is expected of you and how to act?"

"We do," replied Will.

"Good! I wish you success. Report to me at the earliest possible day."

The orderly showed Will and Peterson out of the general's tent. They shook hands and parted. A few moments later Will Prentiss was on his way back to join his company.

He knew that the undertaking before him was an arduous one. Will Prentiss was a brave youth, but he was by no means reckless.

He had no desire to sacrifice the lives of his men needlessly. He had unhesitatingly accepted the dangerous mission. He could now only consider the best possible plan for the safety of his men.

When he reached the camp it was a late hour at night. He passed the guard and entered his own tent. The regiment of which the Grays were a part was extended far along the line of Beauregard's northernmost division.

Will was met by Fred Randolph, his first lieutenant.

"Well, captain, what is the word?" asked the lieutenant eagerly.

"We are ordered on a new campaign," replied Will.

"Good! What is it?"

"We are to get between Colonel Benson and any reinforcements he may send. The plan is to drive him back into our arms at Manassas."

"Whew!" exclaimed Fred. "That is a dangerous undertaking. Are we strong enough for the task?"

"We will do our best. It may be that a demonstration will be enough."

"Well, the Grays are ready and eager to start at once," said the young lieutenant.

"Very good! At sunrise we must be on our way to Manassas. There we will meet Peterson, the scout, who will proceed with us to Walker's Ferry, on the Occoquan."

"Very good, captain! At sunrise every man in the camp shall be ready."

Captain Will Prentiss did not sleep much that night. The enormity of the undertaking before him was not conducive to slumber. His brain was busy with various plans.

When daybreak came the Grays were in line and ready

for the twenty mile march. Their tents and equipments were aboard wagons in their rear.

They set out with the quick step of youth. Not a member of this young company but looked optimistically into the future. Each believed that he was the favored one of fortune.

Manassas was duly reached and here they had the honor to be reviewed by Beauregard himself. The general complimented them highly upon their efficient appearance.

Peterson, the scout, was on hand and ready for his duty. He at once took charge of the leadership of the little company.

The march southward to Occoquan Creek was accomplished in good order. As they drew further away from Beauregard's line they came upon evidences of the enemy.

Small scouting and raiding parties drew back before them, and the Grays encountered no obstinate resistance until they reached the vicinity of Springs Ford.

The Occoquan Creek was a stream of some size and its waters were a union of several streams which flowed through Bull Run, Broad Run and other tributaries.

At Springs Ford was a small outpost of the Confederate Army defended by a small company under Captain Justin Selby. Will had decided to halt his men for a brief rest at the ford.

But as they drew near the distant rattle of musketry was heard.

"Hello!" exclaimed Fred Randolph. "It looks as if something was going on over there."

"Yes," agreed Will with interest. "I think we had better investigate."

"Yes. We don't want to walk into trouble."

"By no means."

A halt was called. Peterson, the scout, who was some distance ahead, came back with a report that a miniature battle was in progress two miles ahead, and seemingly at the ford.

"Probably some raiding party has ventured to attack Selby," said Will.

"The firing is very rapid," said Fred, "and would indicate a lively engagement."

"Ought we not to move on and see what it is?" asked the second lieutenant.

But Karl Peterson, the shrewd old scout, shook his head and replied:

"Better go slow! Suppose you and I climb that hill yonder, captain, and take a look at the country?"

"Very well," agreed Will.

So they left the Grays on the highway and climbed the hill. Will had a powerful glass and scanned the country.

Smoke was seen at the ford two miles away. It was evident that Selby was having a hot time.

"That's what it means," declared Peterson. "Selby is in trouble. I think he may need help. What do you say, captain?"

"We will at once move forward to his assistance," said Will. "Hello! What is that?" he exclaimed suddenly. He brought his glass to bear upon a little glen not a mile away.

He could see moving figures. Even at that distance he could see that the uniforms were of blue.

"Take a look, Peterson," he said. "What do you make of it?"

Peterson used the glass. For a moment he was thoughtful. Finally he said:

"It is a rear attack. The Union forces are moving around to cut Selby off from retreat."

It was a startling revelation. For a moment Will Prentiss was staggered.

"It looks bad for Selby," he said. "They will surround and capture him."

"Unless he gets help," said Peterson.

"Right!" cried Will. "And we are the men to give him that help. Lieutenant, deploy your men and move to the attack. We must make it a surprise."

Fred Randolph lost no time. He knew well that the Grays would be eager to attack, and when he gave the order there was a wild cheer.

In a few moments the Grays were deployed in line of attack and moving swiftly and silently down through the woods.

There was fully a mile to cover. The Union troops were still filing through the glen. It was an odd fact that the Grays encountered no skirmish line.

On they went until suddenly the glen with its woods lay below them. Not until they were almost upon the foe did they know of their approach.

Then shots were exchanged, and Will gave the order to halt. He was too cautious to attack until he had felt of his foe and knew more of his numerical strength.

The Union troops seemed startled at this unexpected attack in their rear. They were seen to face about and hastily seek cover.

Then firing was begun, and it did not take Will long to discover that the foe were stronger than he had expected.

In fact, they were too strong to warrant a direct charge. He cautiously held his men in check and gave the order to throw up light intrenchments.

For Will had no idea of giving up the battle. The Virginia Grays were started on a hard campaign.

CHAPTER II.

THE CAMPAIGN BEGINS.

Peterson, the scout, now gave proof of his wonderful ability. He went down through the glen and penetrated almost into the enemy's line.

He returned in an hour with a thrilling report.

"The foe are five hundred strong," he said. "They are a part of Benson's force. I believe that it is the Union colonel's game to capture this outpost so that he can safely make a dash for our rear line of communication at Manassas."

"I agree with you, Peterson," said Will. "And our gar-

is to deceive him as to our numbers and hold him in check here long enough to send to Beauregard for reinforcements."

"Just so, my boy!"

"Better still, if we could get word to Selby, he would be encouraged to hang on and perhaps to co-operate with us in an attempt to smother the foe."

"The only trouble with that game is the fact that the foe have sufficient men to maintain a battle on both sides. If you had a larger force they would be trapped."

Will saw that this was true.

"For all that, I wish Selby knew that we were here," he said.

Peterson hesitated and then said:

"I think we can adjust that."

"Ah, how?"

"Easily enough! I will undertake to carry the word to Selby!"

"You?"

"Yes."

Will was reflective a moment.

"Do you think you can do it?" he asked. "It seems to me like an impossibility, for you would have to go through their lines."

"I can go through the Union lines with ease," said the scout. "It is by no means a difficult task."

"Good!" cried Will. "It will benefit us greatly. But how shall I know that you have safely reached Selby's camp?"

Peterson pointed to a distant hilltop.

"Do you see that hill?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is just back of Selby's position. I will build a signal fire on its summit."

"Very good!"

A few moments later Peterson stole out of the camp and vanished. Will had felt a bit skeptical as to his ability to carry out his plan. But he knew Peterson was skillful.

The Virginia Grays had quickly run a line of intrenchments along the south side of the glen.

Will took every method to make his numbers seem much larger than they were. He extended his line as much as he dared.

Firing was kept up, but neither side seemed eager to move to the charge. Then time wore on. All the while Will kept a sharp lookout for Peterson's signal.

Thus matters were when Fred Randolph came in excitedly and said:

"The enemy are sending a flag of truce."

"A flag of truce!" exclaimed Will. "Do you believe they think of surrendering?"

"It is more likely that they will demand our surrender!"

"Humph!" exclaimed the young captain. "I hardly think they will get it."

But Will went out to meet the truce bearer. A Union sergeant he was, and as he walked into Will's presence he kept his eyes open. It was plain that he intended to take in all that he could.

But Will took the precaution to have plenty of the Grays in sight, so as to make a formidable showing.

"I am Sergeant Scott," said the truce bearer. "I have been sent here by Colonel Jones to demand your surrender."

Will smiled in a sarcastic way.

"Very kind of Colonel Jones, I'm sure," he said. "I am Captain Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays. As I have a larger force at my back than he has, I must decline to accept his generous offer. Please return my compliments to him."

"I am then authorized by Colonel Jones to say that he will at once move to the attack and that no quarter will be given!"

"Oh, he contemplates a massacre, eh? Very well! Tell him to come on and we will annihilate him!"

The truce bearer looked foolish. But with bravado he went on:

"We know your strength, and we have ten thousand men back of us. We shall carry this raid right down to Beauregard's own door. You will be wiped out. We will give you all the honors of prisoners of war."

"Sir!" said Will sternly. "Go back to your colonel at once. Tell him that the Virginia Grays do not surrender!"

The sergeant bowed.

"Then you will refuse to make terms?"

"Only such terms as will assure the surrender of your entire force. If you do not capitulate within one hour our forces will close in upon you, for you are surrounded."

"I will report to my colonel."

The Union sergeant bowed and walked away with a Confederate guard as escort. He made his way back to the Union lines.

"That is the most refreshing piece of cheek I ever saw in my life," said Fred.

"Pshaw!" said Will. "There was an ulterior motive. That officer came here merely as a feeler."

"Do you believe it?"

"I am very sure of it."

"We shall soon know if he moves to the attack as he threatens."

"Well, we must be ready for him!"

There was a long period of silence after the return of the truce bearer. If the Union colonel thought of executing his threat in the first place he quickly changed his mind.

Meanwhile Will had sent a messenger post haste to Beauregard for reinforcements. He could do nothing now but hold his position and wait.

Thus matters were when nightfall came and the camp fires were lit. Very shrewdly the young captain caused additional fires to be maintained to make the appearance of a large camp.

The Grays were making a big bluff. At any moment the hand might be called. But they were bound to do their best.

All through the night the fires burned on both sides. The Grays slept on their arms in bivouac.

In fact, they had started upon a campaign which was to be from first to last bivouac and battle. At no time were

they to know aught but rough hardship and hostile bullets.

Will hardly slept during the night. He walked the rounds of the pickets and listened for any sounds which might indicate that the foe meditated an attack.

It was about four o'clock in the morning when the sound of horses' hoofs was heard and the picket called out halt to a muffled rider.

But the countersign was given, and he rode into camp.

He was discovered to be a despatch bearer from General Beauregard. Will hastily opened and read the message. Thus it read:

"Headquarters at Manassas.

"My Dear Prentiss: I am sorry, but every available company I have is in the field and I cannot afford to weaken my line to send you reinforcements. I am sorry if Selby is in trouble, but I cannot help him. You must try and help him and fight it out the best you can. May the God of battles be with you.

"(Signed) BEAUREGARD, General Commanding."

Will felt a strange sinking at the heart as he read this. It did not by any means contain the assurance he had hoped for.

But his nature was of that sort which knew not fear or discouragement. He was bound to keep up good cheer.

When daybreak came he looked for the signal that Peterson had found his way through to Selby.

Distant firing was heard.

"I tell you they are going to down Selby," said Fred, despairingly. "We are helpless, Will. I don't see how we are ever going to carry out our plan of getting behind Benson and turning the Union flank."

"Keep cool!" said Will philosophically. "Is not that smoke yonder?"

Both saw now a thin spiral column of smoke rising from the hilltop named by the scout. At once they felt a thrill of joy.

It was certain that Peterson had got through all right. Selby knew by this time that the Grays were on the other side of the Union line. He would hold out as long as he could.

A daring plan had suggested itself to Will. He knew that his own force was a small one to threaten Colonel Benson's rear. Certainly Selby had a full company at the Ford.

He would cut his way through if possible and join forces with him. They would then swing to the north and to Benson's rear.

Of course, the risk was not reduced to any great extent. But a larger showing could be made with two hundred men than with half that number.

So Will laid his plans accordingly. But just as he was considering it a startling thing happened.

Into the camp came Peterson. The daring scout had made his way rapidly back after conveying the word to Selby.

He brought a thrilling report.

"The troops in front of you are falling back to reinforce those taking part in the attack on Selby," he said.

To Will this was an astonishing revelation. He could hardly believe it.

"How is Selby fixed?" he asked.

"He is well intrenched and holding his own," replied Peterson. "Jones cannot drive him a peg, hence he is calling in all his men and especially the rear attack."

"Call the roll!" cried Will sharply. "Get into line, Fred, and we will attack them at once. Selby must not be overwhelmed."

"The outlook is bad," said Peterson, shaking his head. "I think you are Selby's only salvation. However, if Jones knew your exact strength he would not fear you."

"One question," said Will. "Is Jones a subordinate officer to Benson?"

"Well, not exactly. They are working together. Benson is somewhere north of here."

"That is enough. We must in some way rescue Selby and defeat Jones. My plan is to close in on the rear of this flanking column and harass it."

"It is the only thing you can do," admitted the scout.

So the Grays fell into line instantly. They marched out of their intrenchments and with double quick step they swept down into the glen.

In a few moments they went over the breastworks where the enemy had lately been. There was a thin skirmish line to protect the rear of the fleeing troops.

The Grays rushed on in pursuit. The firing in the distance seemed heavier than ever. Still the Grays kept on.

But they could not seem to catch up with the fleeing foe. It was necessary to proceed with some care, as there was much danger of an ambush.

On they went until Peterson asserted that Selby could not be a half mile away. The rattle of the guns was now rapid and even the yells of the charging troops could be heard.

It seemed as if the cheering suddenly increased in volume, which would indicate that the reinforcing columns had arrived.

It was the time for the Grays to strike. On they passed rapidly now.

Suddenly bursting out of the forest, they came upon the scene of battle. It was an enlivening spectacle.

The Stars and Stripes were seen moving to the attack on the outpost so gallantly defended by Selby. The Grays, with a wild cheer, burst into view.

Coming up in the rear of the charging columns of blue, the outlook was for a moment a demoralizing one. They changed front and prepared to meet the charge of the gray.

The Virginia Grays opened fire, and for a moment the Union columns wavered. Will Prentiss rushed in front of his men waving his sword.

"Now, boys!" he cried. "One more rush! Give it to them!"

With a wild cheer, the Grays rushed forward again. The next moment they were fighting hand to hand. Will knew

that his advantage lay in the fact that Selby would attack fiercely on the other side.

And this was just what happened. Selby's men rushed from their intrenchments and drove the foe back into the woods.

Not knowing how strong the force was in their rear, the Union soldiers became panic-stricken and broke ranks. In vain their officers tried to rally them.

The result was that the Grays cut their way through the woods and effected a junction with Selby's men.

With wild cheers they greeted each other. Will and Selby gripped hands warmly.

"You came just in time," declared Selby. "We were about out of ammunition. We could have held out but a short while longer."

"I am glad that we have relieved you," said Will heartily.

"Well, you may imagine how glad we were to welcome your scout Peterson."

"He is a wonderful man," said Will. "When he left our camp I never expected to see him again alive. But you have had some hard fighting here."

"Yes, the foe has outnumbered us five to one. But your coming turned the tide."

"Do you think that if Jones had known our exact number we could have succeeded?"

"No! He doubtless thought Beauregard himself had come down upon him."

"Well, Captain Selby," said Will, "you have held your post here nobly. Now what do you propose to do?"

"I shall continue to hold it!" replied Selby.

"But that is not necessary now. In fact, it is quite inadvisable. I cannot remain with you to defend this point, which seems to have become of little value now. I have another mission."

Selby seemed surprised.

"What is it?" he asked.

CHAPTER III.

THE EAVESDROPPERS.

With this Will detailed to Captain Selby his mission as given him by General Beauregard. The brave captain listened with deep interest.

"There is great danger in your enterprise," he said. "You are but a company of boys to pit yourselves against an army."

"Nevertheless we are ordered to make as great a demonstration as we can in Colonel Benson's rear. We shall do our best."

"What do you think I ought to do?"

Will shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you orders to remain here?"

"No, not strictly! I was posted here to hold this point on the highway. As the spot has now become untenable, I am certainly warranted in making a change."

"You certainly are," agreed Will. "Why not join your forces with us?"

Selby's eyes sparkled.

"That is capital," he said. "If we had horses we could harass Benson's rear and perhaps cut his line of communication."

"We may be able to obtain horses later," said Will. "My company are easily mounted and are used to the saddle."

"I think it is a grand plan. I will talk with my lieutenant."

"Let me know as soon as possible, for I am going to move out of here very soon."

"I will do so."

The Union troops had retreated some distance down the run. Will had no idea of giving pursuit.

He knew the folly of a long battle with his limited force. His plan was to hit and get away.

So the battle for the day was over. It was now in order to resume his march for Walker's Ferry without delay.

The Grays were drawn up in line. They had lost a few of their number in the fight. But their ardor was undiminished.

As the Grays prepared to march, Selby came hurrying up.

"We have decided to go with you," he cried.

"Very good!" agreed Will. "We are much pleased. As you are an older man, Captain Selby, I will be pleased to resign the command to you."

"By no means!" cried Selby. "I will not agree to that. The commission is yours, and that gives you the right to command. Besides I desire that you should."

So Will was obliged to accept the command, a fact which was most agreeable to all. In a very short time the whole force was in line and marching for Walker's Ferry.

Leaving the run, they had soon crossed to a highway beyond. Along this they pushed as rapidly as possible.

Until nightfall they marched. Then they arrived at crossroads in a dense growth of timber. Here for a time they were nonplussed.

Peterson, the scout, was once more called into service. He knew the roads well enough, but as they were now near the Ferry, it was necessary to proceed with caution, and he did not know just what road to take to ensure safety.

"I think it would be well to camp here in these woods," he said. "I will go ahead and reconnoiter. I will return and report later."

"Very well," agreed Will.

So camp was made. Selby's men made their camp on one side of the highway and the Grays on the other.

Peterson was ready to start upon his reconnoitering tour when an idea occurred to Will. As Fred Randolph came up he said:

"Fred, I am going to accompany Peterson on his reconnoitering trip. I want to leave you in command."

"All right, captain," agreed Fred. "I will do my best."

Peterson was pleased to know that Will was to go with him. The two quietly left the camp and set out through the woods.

They did not keep to the highway, for fear that they might run into a Union outpost or guard.

For a ways they kept to the woods, and then finally emerged into a clearing. In the centre of this was a miserable hut.

A light gleamed in the window, and this aroused the curiosity, as well as interest, of the two.

"Hello!" exclaimed the scout. "I do not recall this habitation. Let us have a look at it."

Even as he spoke a startling thing happened. The rumble of wheels was heard and up the woods road to the cabin came a covered vehicle drawn by four horses.

Beside the coach were armed raiders. Their slouched hats were pulled over their eyes, and in the gloom their faces could not be seen.

The scout gave a start, and, catching Will's arm, pulled him behind a tree.

"There's some mischief afoot here," he whispered. "I am interested to know what it is. That carriage belongs to some wealthy family hereabouts."

They watched the scene intently.

A negro sprung down from the box and opened the door. The cabin door opened and light flashed out.

It illumined the side of the coach and the figures of the outriders. It could be seen that they were dressed in suits of blue.

From the coach stepped a man who wore a colonel's uniform. He was of heavy build, with a tuft of beard upon his chin.

His air was that of a foreigner. He walked pompously into the cabin. Behind him walked an orderly sergeant.

They entered the cabin and the door closed behind them. The driver turned his horses about and rested them under a tree nearby. The outriders dropped from their saddles and proceeded to chat and exchange rough jokes.

"What do you make of it?" whispered Will.

"I hardly know what to think," replied Peterson. "Only I would like to know what is going on in that hut."

"So would I!"

"Suppose we try and ascertain. I have an idea it is a secret meeting of some sort. We may have stumbled upon an important piece of treachery."

Will saw the importance of investigating the matter. So he yielded to the plan proposed by the scout.

This was to cautiously creep up to the window of the hut and peer in. It was a risky undertaking, as both knew.

There was the possibility of being seen by the outriders. But Peterson was exceedingly anxious to know what was going on in the hut.

They approached it from the rear, using the greatest of caution. In a few moments they had crept across the intervening space and had their position under the window.

Voices could be heard in the hut high pitched and angry. Unable to restrain themselves longer the two eavesdroppers peered in through the pane.

The scene they beheld was one which gave them a start.

The hut had but one long room. On one side was a hearth on which blazed a fire. But overhead was a loft, or

small attic, open at one end and from which a ladder led down to the living room.

The two eavesdroppers saw first four men seated at a table. Three wore blue uniforms. The fourth wore gray.

The men in blue were officers, one of them being the colonel they had seen alight from the carriage, the second was the orderly, and the third to wear blue uniform being a lieutenant.

The man in gray was tall and spare of feature, with an iron-gray beard. His eyes were deep set and had a penetrating glance.

He wore a uniform of the rank of lieutenant. As Peterson saw his face he gave a start and whispered:

"The traitor! He belongs to Beauregard's personal staff. His name is Percy Wadley. What is he doing here?"

"That will be interesting for us to discover," replied Will. "Do you know the other?"

"Yes. One is Colonel Benson himself, and his orderly is with him. The other is Lieutenant Van Dyke, of Benson's staff. It can mean only one thing, and that is that Percy Wadley is a traitor."

"If he were not he would not be meeting these Union officers secretly here!"

"That is true!"

"Great ginger! What is that?"

From the shadows of the loft over the heads of the four men there had suddenly emerged into view the figure of a young girl.

Her face was partly averted, but it could be seen to be pale and eager. Her attitude was that of listening.

She was of slender build and dressed in a neat costume of gray. Even as Will saw her he gasped:

"Mercy! It is my sister Nellie!"

It was indeed Nellie Prentiss, well known as one of the most beautiful young girls in all Virginia.

When Colonel Prentiss assumed a place on Beauregard's staff and Will marched away with his company of Grays Nellie Prentiss was not content to remain at home.

She was an ardent champion of the Confederacy and was not content to remain idle while her country needed the help of all, both old and young. She entered the service as a female spy and had done much valuable work in Washington.

But how she came here in the loft of this miserable cabin was a conundrum which puzzled Will and Peterson as well.

But that she was playing the part of eavesdropper upon this secret meeting there was no doubt.

Now, however, Will noticed that in one corner of the cabin there sat an old negro woman. She was stolid and indifferent to the proceedings.

It was plain that the cabin belonged to her. But now they became too deeply interested in the conversation that was taking place to note aught else.

Colonel Benson, the famous raider and a man whom Beauregard was anxious to capture, was speaking:

"The information you give us is of no value to us at all. We want to know just where Beauregard is to strike his

next blow. It is not enough to know that he is simply going to strike a blow."

Percy Wadley, one of Beauregard's trusted men, made reply:

"The information you desire is valuable."

"Well, name your price?"

"Five thousand dollars in gold!"

"Too much!"

"Very well!" said Wadley, essaying to rise. "I am willing to drop negotiations at once. I cannot sacrifice my personal safety and my honor for nothing."

"Honor?" sneered Benson. "I can see but little value in that!"

"Do you mean to insult me?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Benson hotly. "Going to ease your temper, are you? Don't you know that you are at this moment absolutely in my power? A word from me will betray you to Beauregard."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Wadley, with flaming face. "So you seek by this method of blackmail to force the secret from me!"

"I am only warning you that it is within my power to do so. I offer you one thousand dollars in gold for your information."

"I decline it!"

"As you please, Wadley!"

The traitor arose.

"I wish to say in going," he said, "that you have received from me the last bit of information against my government that you ever will. I am done with this business forever!"

"Is that true, Lieutenant Wadley?" said Colonel Benson in a soft, insinuating tone. "You quite surprise me. What vocation will you choose next?"

"That of an honest man."

"You will find it the most strenuous you ever undertook!"

"I presume you speak from experience."

Benson's face flushed hotly.

"Don't insult me!" he gritted.

"You insulted me just now!"

"Did I? I did not deem it possible. Where are you going, Wadley?"

"Back to my post of duty at Manassas."

"One moment! I beg you to remain!"

Wadley looked at Benson coldly. His gray uniform seemed out of place there among the blue.

"Well! What is your wish?"

Benson placed a whistle to his lips. In an instant a couple of outriders sprung into the room.

"You will place this man under arrest," he said curtly. His words caused Wadley to give a mighty start. His face turned a grayish pallor.

"Place me under arrest?" he gasped.

"Yes!" said Colonel Benson icily.

"But—I am privileged to come here and negotiate with you on a basis of honor. You cannot make a prisoner of me!"

"I certainly cannot give you your personal liberty at present."

"Will you explain why?"

"Certainly! You have renounced your allegiance to our cause. You are going back to the Confederacy. You know all our plans. I have no intention that General Beauregard shall gain possession of them."

Wadley smiled in a sickly way.

"I will give you my word of honor that General Beauregard shall never know them!" he said.

Colonel Benson snapped his fingers.

"I wouldn't give that for your word of honor," he declared. "I cannot take chances at present. You can, if you choose, aid me in my project of cutting off a large part of the Confederate Army at Manassas. I have given you the option!"

"But you will not pay me my price!"

"Your price is exorbitant!"

"It is not beyond reason. It is worth much more than that to you," pleaded the traitor. "You know it well!"

"One thousand dollars in gold is all I will give. Take it or nothing. We are wasting time here. Come, Van Dyke, order my coach. I must go back to headquarters."

Colonel Benson arose and started for the door. Instantly Wadley cried:

"I give in! You have the best of me!"

"Do you mean it?"

"I do!"

Benson sank back into his chair.

"Let it be brief, then. Now, what is the next move of Beauregard?"

Wadley leaned forward and whispered a few words. Benson nodded slowly, and then he said:

"Just as I thought! I will send you the money, Wadley. You may go now. Meet me at the Ferry to-morrow night. At last I have just what I wanted. Trust me to block Beauregard's next move. That is all I wanted. I am content!"

CHAPTER IV.

A MEETING OF LOVERS.

Will and Peterson had listened to all this with the deepest of interest. Now Wadley, with an air of relief, turned to the door.

He passed out into the night. As he turned the corner of the house he almost brushed past the two watchers. Benson and his men entered the lumbering coach. One moment only Peterson hesitated.

Then he said:

"Follow the traitor! He is the one we want to get!"

In an instant they had slipped away from the window and into the gloom. A moment before Wadley had been almost within touch.

Now, however, he was not to be seen or heard. He had vanished almost as if swallowed up in the earth.

Will and Peterson tried in vain to get on his track. They were utterly unable to find any trace of him.

They were completely baffled. After a long quest, in lieu of something better to do, they returned to the hut.

A light still burned in the window, but the Union officers and their escort were gone. Will and the scout paused in the edge of the clearing.

"I wish our boys had been within easy call," said Will. "What an excellent opportunity it would have been to capture those two schemers."

"You are right," agreed Peterson. "It is much to be regretted. But it will be easy enough to catch Wadley. We need only send word to General Beauregard."

"The scoundrelly traitor!"

"That is certainly what he is!"

Just then a sudden recollection of Nellie Prentiss, his sister, came to Will. He had last seen her crouching in the loft.

How had she come there and what was she doing? That was the question. He was determined to find out.

Will stepped up to the cabin door and lightly rapped upon it. There was a stir inside and shuffling feet were heard.

Then the door opened, and on the threshold stood the colored woman. She shaded her eyes with her hand and in a croaking voice asked:

"Wha' yo' want wif po' ole Nance? She am jes' a po' ole cullud woman!"

"All right, Nance," said Will briskly. "I want to see my sister."

A sharp, eager cry came from the interior of the cabin.

"I know that voice! Oh, Nance, let him come in. It is my brother Will!"

The next moment Will was in the cabin and embracing his sister. It was a happy meeting, but almost instantly the young captain asked:

"Nellie, how came you here?"

The young girl's face lit up.

"I have made some important discoveries of much value to the Confederacy," she declared. "I am going to carry them to General Beauregard to-morrow. But, let me ask how you came here? First, however, I will say that I learned of an appointment here between Percy Wadley and the Union colonel!"

"Wadley is a traitor!"

"He is not the only one. Can you wonder that I am eager to get to headquarters?"

"The Grays are but a few miles away," said Will.

"Indeed! This is a perilous region. How dare you come here? There is great danger that you may be overwhelmed by a superior force."

"I am aware of that," said Will. "But I have a special commission from General Beauregard, and I must execute it. But I fear for you, Nell. This seems like desperate business for a young woman like you!"

"I do not fear," said the young girl with spirit. "Old

Nance hid me away safely, and I heard the whole plot. I have a horse hitched in the woods below here. I shall at daybreak mount and ride to Manassas as fast as I can."

"You ought to have a body guard."

"No!" replied the spirited young girl, with flashing eyes. "I believe there is yet sufficient chivalry in Virginia to admit of a woman travelling safely alone."

"It is not our people you need fear. But those Yankees——"

"Will, it is all wrong. There are true men and brave in the Union Army. I have learned that. Really, this war is a sad and fatal mistake!"

"I believe you, Nell. It ought never to have been."

"We are sacrificing the best blood of our nation in a foolish strife which can avail but little, whichever side wins."

"Ah, Nell! the South must maintain its honor!"

"Honor! An empty word! It is the word of the politician. However, now that war is on, the South must fight through to the end. She must do her duty."

"That is the way I look at it, Nell."

Brother and sister were talking thus when Peterson, the scout, suddenly exclaimed in a tone of alarm:

"Someone is coming. I hear the rattle of arms. I fear we are in danger!"

In an instant Nell sprang to the window and pulled down the curtain. Her face was very pale.

"It can be only Union troops," she said. "There are no Confederate soldiers in this vicinity. Oh, what shall we do, Will? You must not be captured!"

"Captured!" exclaimed the young captain, as he unsheathed his sword. "I would die first."

Footsteps were heard outside. It was a moment of extreme excitement. But old Nance hobbled forward eagerly:

"I don' tole yo' to climb up dar in de loft," she cried. "It am de bes' place!"

"The loft!" exclaimed Nell. "Yes, go up quick, Will!"

So the young captain and the scout crept up into the loft and none too soon. There was a light rap on the door.

Nell stood by the glowing hearth, while old Nance unbarred the door. Across the threshold stepped a young officer, handsome in a uniform of blue. Behind him was a guard of soldiers in blue.

He stepped into the cabin and called out in a cheery voice:

"Ah, mammy, you will pardon us for this intrusion, but we are hungry and thought perhaps you might warm our stomachs as well as our hearts with hoe cakes. We will pay you well."

"Bress de Lor', massa! I neber turn nobody from dis do', eben if he am a Yankee. De good Lor' would neber prosper ole Nance fo' dat!"

"That's right, mammy. Your fire looks good and cheery. I have four of my comrades with me. Come in, boys! Oh!" he paused, as if shot, and doffed his cap. Not until that moment had he seen Nell standing half in the shadow.

"I beg pardon!"

Nell's face had whitened, and for an instant she stiffened. Her eyes burned with a strange light.

"No apology is necessary. You are very welcome here, Jack!"

"Nell!" exclaimed the young officer with a step toward her. But he paused. For a moment they stood looking at each other.

Jack Clark, captain of the Fairdale Blues, was the young officer so well known to Nell Prentiss. A few months before Will Prentiss had left school at Fairdale, New York. When he left he parted with sad thoughts from his chum and dearest friend, Jack Clark.

Both were young men of aristocratic families. Will Prentiss was a Southern boy and compelled to unsheathe his sword for the South.

Jack Clark was a Northern boy and the captain of a young company known as the Fairdale Blues.

Nellie Prentiss and Jack Clark had been drawn toward each other from the first meeting. While there had been no actual engagement, yet each had a warm liking for the other.

Jack's sister, Bessie Clark, had adopted the profession of nurse and was at the moment in Washington.

It need hardly be said that Will Prentiss, hiding in the loft, was thrilled as he saw his one-time chum below. But he did not make his presence known.

For a moment Jack Clark and Nellie Prentiss looked silently at each other. Then the young captain said:

"What has brought you here, Nell?"

She looked at him with a flash of her beautiful eyes.

"Don't you know that I am in the service of my country?"

"You?" ejaculated Jack. "A woman in the ranks? What do you mean?"

"Oh, no! I do not wear a uniform. I am a secret service agent, or what you might be pleased to term a spy! I have penetrated your lines. At the present moment I am resting in this safe place, with this faithful former servant, old Nance."

Jack Clark gave a start.

"A female spy!" he exclaimed. "President Lincoln counts them the most dangerous element of the war. He has issued a decree that all such be detained in Washington until after the war."

"Then you would make me a prisoner?"

They looked at each other. It was a hard moment.

"Duty would demand it!" said Jack softly, "but—I cannot do it!"

Her face lit up and she gave a merry laugh.

"Oh, you faint heart!" she cried. "I fear you would never be a success as a stern man of war."

"Not if I had opponents of your sex," he replied. "But, seriously, Nell, this is not a safe place for you. Our forces are moving this way, and the march of an army entails the dark deeds of bushwhackers and guerrillas. I would advise you to change your abode at once!"

"This is not my abode," she replied. "I find it a safe harbor of refuge at present. I shall leave here at daybreak for——"

She paused, and her face crimsoned. Jack Clark gave a start and grew pale.

"Nell," he said, "you are going from here to General Beauregard's headquarters."

"I am," she replied firmly.

"You have in your possession information concerning our plans and movements. If Beauregard gets them we shall be defeated."

For a moment there was silence.

She stood calm and statue-like. He walked to the window and back. Old Nance, the negro woman, lit her pipe and sat down by the fire, softly crooning.

"Nell," said Captain Clark in a calm tone, "it pains me greatly to ask you not to take that information to General Beauregard."

"Jack, it is my duty!"

"And you will do it?"

"There is no appeal!"

In the loft Will Prentiss and Peterson, the scout, were spellbound listeners. It was a dramatic situation.

Jack Clark paced the floor with quick nervous step. He wiped the cold perspiration from his brow.

"This war is a curse upon the country," he said bitterly. "It is all wrong." Once he put his hand on the door-latch. Then he turned and went back to the side of the girl he loved.

"Nell," he said in a deep tone, "I can't permit you to take that information to Beauregard. It would mean our defeat!"

"I am your prisoner," she said with a trace of haughtiness in her tones.

"No! You are free as the air. But give me your promise."

"I cannot forswear my duty."

Jack turned again to the door. Again he raised the latch. Then he turned to his men.

"I hope you will forgive me, Nell. But I must do it! Boys, you are to guard this cabin closely. Let none of its inmates escape."

He closed the door and went out. Nell still stood by the fireplace. The four guards took up their position by the door.

The position of Will Prentiss and Peterson in the loft was a thrilling one. They were virtually prisoners.

They knew the danger attendant upon their position full well. At any moment Jack might return with a stronger guard and it would be a natural thing to search the cabin.

In that case Will Prentiss and his companion would certainly be discovered.

While Will was longing to clasp his old friend by the hand, yet he did not care to meet him under the present circumstances.

So he was not at all reassured by his present position. He looked at Peterson and the scout looked at him.

Just then Will chanced to hear a movement below, and, glancing down, he saw Nell looking up.

The young girl's face wore an eager expression. Her

back was to the guards and they could not see the rapid movement of her fingers.

But Will saw and understood at once she was using the deaf and dumb alphabet. At once he answered her. Fortunately both understood it.

"You must not remain here," she said.

"We cannot help ourselves," replied Will.

"Yes, you can!"

"How?"

"Nance tells me that there is a skylight in the roof. You can open that and escape by leaping to the ground."

"The guard will hear us!"

"Nance will help you. Presently she will begin to arrange her dishes and pans and she will make it so noisy that you will not be heard."

"Very good, but what is to become of you?"

"Have no fear for me. Even if I am captured, I am a woman and no harm will be done me."

"I wish I could feel sure of that."

"You may feel sure of it."

"But—what about this information so important to Beauregard?"

Nell's face lit up eagerly.

"Do you think you could carry it to him?" she asked.

"Yes, provided I can escape!"

CHAPTER V.

A BOLD DASH.

Will Prentiss answered the query with sincerity. He fully believed that he could do as he said.

Nell seemed to hesitate a moment. Finally she made reply in the deaf and dumb alphabet:

"I feel so sure of escaping that I don't think I shall require you to carry the message. Again, I cannot very well give it to you here. So I beg you to look out for your own safety and I will look out for mine."

Will bowed in reply. He turned and made a sign to Peterson. They had not long to wait.

Nell said something in an undertone to old Nance, and she began to busy herself about her pots and pans, making quite a clatter.

Under cover of this noise Will and the scout were able to change their position in the attic.

They crept its length and presently found the ladder spoken of by Nell. It led to a skylight in the roof of the hut. It was very short, containing but two or three rounds. They paused here and listened.

There was no indication that they had been heard by the guard. All seemed safe, so Will placed his foot on the lower round of the ladder.

He mounted it, and reaching up felt for the big trap-door above. He found that it was unfastened and he could lift it.

He pushed it upward and felt the cool air of the night in

his face. His heart thrilled, for he realized that it meant freedom.

He swung the trap back and was about to creep out upon the sloping roof. It was but an easy drop to the ground below and he would be safe.

But just then an unexpected catastrophe occurred. There was a crash and the round of the ladder on which he stood gave way.

Down he went and struck the floor of the loft with a crash. Instantly the guards below could be heard rushing about and a loud hail went up:

"Surrender and come down, you Confederate dogs! We'll fill you with lead if you don't."

For a moment Will and Peterson clutched each other in the gloom. It seemed as if all was up.

But the scout leaped up and caught the edge of the trap. He drew himself up in an instant and was on the roof.

Then he leaned over the edge and said:

"Quick, captain! There is no time to lose!"

Will realized this well. He answered the demand at once by seizing the scout's hands and was drawn up onto the roof.

Then they slid down to the edge. It was but a little drop of a dozen feet to the ground. They struck the soft turf unharmed.

Just as they reached the ground one of the Union guards came dashing around the house. In the darkness he could be seen but dimly.

He made a fierce thrust at Will with his bayonet, but Peterson dodged under it and butted his head into his stomach.

The soldier went over like a ninepin. Then Will and the scout dashed around the other corner of the house.

They saw a slender figure suddenly emerge from the door and slip into the gloom.

"Nell!" gasped Will. "She will escape!"

He shot forward in the direction taken by her. In a few moments he had overtaken her and exclaimed:

"Nell, it is me—Will! You need have no fear!"

"Oh, Will!" gasped the breathless and plucky young girl. "How fortunate it all was. We shall escape if I can reach my horse, which is out here in a thicket."

"How did you slip by the guard?"

"In their excitement to get you they forgot me. I slipped right by them. It seems as if the hand of Providence was in it."

Peterson was ahead and led the way. They were now deep in the woods.

The sounds of pursuit had ceased in their rear.

After they had run on for some ways Nellie Prentiss came to a stop.

"Wait!" she said. "I think I know this spot. Yonder is the gate to a lane leading down to the highway. My horse is near here. Ah, what did I tell you?"

The shrill neigh of a horse smote upon the night air. In a moment Nell dashed into the bushes and presently emerged leading a fine horse by the bridle rein.

"I am all right now!" she cried in tones of joy. "I shall

ride to Beauregard's headquarters at once. I shall tell him of Wadley's treachery and of Benson's movements. It will defeat the plans of McClellan and thwart his game to cripple Beauregard!"

"Nell," cried Will, embracing her, "I am proud of you. You are the bravest girl I ever knew. But I fear you are incurring too many risks."

"I do not fear," replied the plucky young girl. "But there is no time to lose."

"You are not going alone!"

"Indeed I am!"

"Wait! I will send a guard with you!" cried Will.

"No, you won't! I know this country too well. Whoa! Hotspur! Whoa! I say!"

She sprung lightly into the saddle. A word of farewell and away she dashed down the dark lane. Will stood a moment in indecision until he felt Peterson's touch on his arm.

"What now, captain?"

"Back to our camp," cried Will. "There is no time to lose. By daybreak we must be on our way to Walker's Ferry. The game has begun."

So the two set out with all haste for the camp of the Grays. They knew its location well now.

They kept on until suddenly they met with the hail of a picket.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends!" replied Will.

"Advance, friends, and give the countersign!"

"All roads lead to Rome!" replied Will. The picket lowered his bayonet. As Will and Peterson drew nearer he gave a sharp cry of recognition:

"It is our captain," he declared. "Shall I call the guard, captain?"

"By no means," replied Will. "We are in a hurry. Allow us to pass!"

The sentinel saluted and they passed on. In a few moments they were in the camp.

It is hardly necessary to say that Fred Randolph was delighted at the safe return of Will and Peterson from their thrilling expedition.

All the rest of the Grays were asleep in their bivouac. The night was conducive to sleeping upon the ground with comfort.

"Well, captain, what have you learned?" asked Fred Randolph with interest.

"We have learned some very important facts," replied Will. "Wadley, of Beauregard's staff, is a traitor, for one thing. Then I have learned that McClellan is feeling out this part of our line with Benson before making a dash on our right flank to capture Manassas."

"It never can be done!"

"It never will be done, for word is already on its way now to General Beauregard."

"Good! Who carries it?"

"My sister Nellie!"

"Nell Prentiss! She is doing great work. You should be proud of her."

"I am," replied Will. "Now, Fred, we are going to seek a few hours' sleep. Call me at daybreak and have the Grays ready for a long hard march!"

"Then we are to move?"

"Yes! We shall hope to get between Benson and the Alexandria highway to-morrow night. Do you see?"

"If we have no more battles!"

"Just so! If we have no more battles, and we will try to avoid such a thing."

"I think it is well."

"Oh, yes, by all means!"

Peterson had already rolled himself up in a blanket and was fast asleep. Will hastened to do the same.

The reveille awoke Will early in the morning. He sprung up at once. The Boys in Gray had fallen into line for roll-call. Then they broke ranks to get breakfast.

After breakfast they fell into line, all equipped for a long hard march. Will walked out and addressed them:

"Virginia Grays," he said, "we are about to enter upon an enterprise which is almost as desperate in its features as a forlorn hope. We, a small body of men, with our combined forces not numbering two hundred, are expected to attack the rear guard of an army numbering thousands. It devolves upon us to create a panic and stop the advance of a force which menaces headquarters at Manassas. We are assuming a great risk.

"We may succeed! On the other hand, we may be wiped out in an instant. These are the chances of war. But we are sent upon this arduous duty and we must render a faithful account. I ask you only to follow where I lead. We will hope to win honor and success!"

Cheers greeted the speech. Then the Grays fell into line and the march began.

Down the tree-bordered highway they now marched.

Ahead of the column scouts ranged the country for miles. They brought back reports of the enemy, but they were in force to the north. Nothing was seen of them to the south.

"We are going around their left flank," decided Will. "Everything is working well. I think we shall succeed."

But, despite this assurance, there was a feeling that they were marching into the jaws of a lion.

If those jaws should close the Grays would be wiped out of existence in an instant. Every moment they were getting further away from their own army.

Selby's men brought up the rear. For some miles they marched on without incident.

The Grays had entered upon a region of great roughness. Forests had been levelled and the scrub growth had made of the country a literal wilderness.

Through this oak and sycamore scrub there were paths and roads innumerable. It was in this strange and uninviting region that the hard campaign of the Grays was to be fought.

The Grays had come to a little glade through which ran a small stream. Suddenly a sharp hail went up, followed by a shot. The bullet struck the staff of the flag carried by the Grays. Then the blue uniforms of Union soldiers were seen among the trees.

In an instant Will Prentiss was in front of his men.

He gave sharp orders and quickly deployed them in line of battle. Selby's men fell in on the left.

Into the scrub growth they went, seeking cover. Fire was opened upon the Union line at once.

Then a surprising discovery was made.

This was that the Union troops were but a thin skirmish line. They were easily driven back by the Grays, who now advanced rapidly and with confidence.

But they had not gone many hundreds of yards before a surprising discovery was made. Cannon balls came tearing through the underbrush.

They had run upon the enemy's artillery. This was entirely unexpected. For a moment Will thought of falling back.

But through an opening in the trees he was able to see entirely the location of the enemy. He saw a breastwork of logs and earth. Upon it was mounted cannon and behind it he saw the heads of a swarm of Union soldiers. The Stars and Stripes floated over the breastworks.

Will hesitated until suddenly a messenger came with a startling report. This was to the effect that Union soldiers were in their rear.

This was an unexpected development and conducive to much alarm. But Will, who conferred with Peterson, said:

"We cannot retreat if we would. We must go forward. There is nothing else to do."

"Forward!" cried Fred Randolph in ringing tones. "We will show them what we can do. Shall we advance now, captain?"

"Yes!" replied Will. "Are you ready, Captain Selby?" Selby hesitated a moment.

"Do you think we can carry the breastwork?" he asked.

"I do not know that we can," said Will, "but we can try!"

"But—if it is a useless sacrifice of men——"

"Captain Selby," said Will quietly, "we do not ask you to lead. The Virginia Grays will make the assault. We only ask you to hold your men in reserve."

CHAPTER VI.

A BRILLIANT CHARGE.

Selby's face colored.

"You cannot accuse me or my men of cowardice," he said.

"Far from it," said Will. "I understand how you feel, Captain Selby, but there is no alternative. We have orders to place ourselves in the rear of Benson's columns. We are at this moment between two opposing forces. We must cut our way out. Our best and only course is to go ahead!"

The brave but cautious captain bowed.

"I can see your meaning," he said, "and you are right. My men will be held in readiness. They are willing to go in when called upon."

"Very well, Captain Selby."

Will now turned to Fred and said:

"Give the order for a bayonet charge. We must have the breastworks."

"All right, captain!"

At the order up from the scrub growth sprung the brave little company of boys. In a moment they were advancing in regular line.

Will Prentiss was not the one to send his men where he feared to go. He unsheathed his sword and leaped in front of them.

Down the little descent swept the boys. A moment more and they were in the timber. The breastwork was before them.

It bristled with armed men. Volleys flashed and the cannon roared. Of course, some of the boys fell. Now they were almost up to the breastwork, when a tremendous burst of smoke and flame leaped from the muzzles of the guns.

For a moment the gray line wavered. But Will Prentiss, sword uplifted, leaped upon the breastwork.

"Forward, Virginia Grays!" he shouted.

His brave example turned the tide of battle. With a wild cheer the Grays cleared the breastwork and were among the defenders.

The fierce hand-to-hand fight which followed was sickening. Bravely the Union soldiers made resistance.

But they were unable to hold their own. Selby's men came rushing to the support of the Grays.

Out of their intrenchments the Union soldiers were driven. They were scattered in the woods.

Will Prentiss had no idea of holding the fort or of remaining long in the vicinity.

He was shrewd enough to realize that the foe might be reinforced and return in overwhelming numbers.

So he ordered the cannon spiked and the breastwork blown up with gun powder. Kegs were rolled under the logs and fired by a train and fuse.

The explosion was terrific, sending tons of earth and logs into the air. The breastwork was entirely demolished.

Then the Grays started away rapidly through the forest, Selby's men bringing up the rear.

Peterson, who knew the region well, brought up the rear. For an hour they marched on with great haste.

There was no sound of pursuit, greatly to Will's surprise. It seemed as if they must have gotten through Benson's line and were already behind him.

All day they marched cautiously, waiting at times for hours in the cover of the forest or the edge of a swamp. They knew the Union troops were all about them.

That night they bivouacked in a little clump of trees near a creek. One thing had begun to trouble Will greatly. Rations were getting low.

They must soon forage or go hungry. He knew that the country had been raided and scoured by Union cavalry. Consequently the food supply was about exhausted.

The place in which they camped seemed somewhat remote from any of the plantations. A little creek ran by within a hundred yards.

On the other side was a high cliff, partly wooded. The

camp was made in a clump of trees at the base of this cliff.

Altogether it was a sheltered and most desirable place to camp.

But as soon as camp had been made Peterson came up to Will and said:

"Captain, if you will give me ten men I think I can bring back some bacon and perhaps fowls from a plantation near here."

"Pay them for their stuff," said Will, giving the scout some money. "Do not take anything without paying for it."

"I will pay for it. But if I find it I shall take it."

"That is right. It is necessary that our boys have food. We cannot starve. Any loyal Virginia farmer should recognize that fact."

"I think most of the farmers do," said the scout, "but they don't like to go hungry themselves."

"In no case take all they have," said Will. "That I cannot consent to."

"Very well, captain."

The scout took his leave. Ten of the Grays went with him. After he had gone Captain Selby came in and said:

"One of my men climbed to the top of the cliff and has reported that Union camp fires are on every side of us."

Will gave a start.

"Do you mean that?"

"I do!"

"In that case we are surrounded."

"That is just the size of it."

Will shrugged his shoulders.

"We can do nothing to-night," he said. "We must wait until morning. Do you suppose Benson's scouts have located us and they are closing in upon us?"

"I don't know. It looks dubious."

"The best we can do is wait."

"Yes."

So Will went into his tent, which was made of boughs, and rolled himself up in his blanket.

But it was not to sleep long. There was too much of anxiety upon his mind. He felt that they were in a land of danger.

He presently arose and went out. The sky was calm and starlit. The air was still and cold.

Suddenly Will saw the figures of a small troop of men march into the camp. He at once went forward.

"Ah, Peterson!" he exclaimed. "You have returned. What luck?"

The scout shrugged his shoulders.

"You may see," he said, "we have nothing."

"Nothing?"

"We have visited Rigby's plantation. He has nothing left but bare sustenance for himself and his daughter."

"Who is this Rigby?"

"He is a loyal Virginian. The Union officers have lately been quartered upon him, and they require the best of living."

"You did not go further?"

"We could not!"

"Why?"

"There is a line of Union troops beyond."

"Peterson," said Will with anxiety, "I fear we are in a bad fix."

"What do you mean?"

"Come with me to the top of the cliff. Let us take a view of the country."

The scout followed the young captain up the cliff. They climbed to its very summit. The view was now, of course, dimmed by darkness of night.

Yet far down in the black void below they saw the twinkling stars of light which to them were evidences of the existence of Union troops.

These camp fires were to the north, to the south, to the east and west. They literally surrounded their position.

It was a most startling reflection that they were surrounded. Their victory of the day before had merely resulted in placing them within the enemy's lines.

Hemmed in on all sides, it was now a dubious outlook. The chances for escape looked dark. There was no doubt now that the reserve in Benson's rear was much closer to the latter than Beauregard had dreamed of.

Peterson shook his head.

"I'm afraid it's all a mistake," he said. "Certainly it is a bad scrape!"

"So it looks to me," said the young captain. "I don't know what move to make next."

"We can only wait for morning. I will then take a trip over the creek and get the lay of the land. For the present I think your position is a safe one. I don't think the enemy knows of our presence here."

"Nor do I," agreed Will. "But we cannot stay here forever."

They now began to descend the cliff. They took a path which led further to the north. Below twinkled a light.

"It is Rigby's house," said the scout. "And now it occurs to me that I ought to see him. He knows the country north of here better than I do, and I think perhaps I ought to have a talk with him."

"I will accompany you," said Will.

Rigby's plantation was known as one of the finest in the region. Thomas Rigby was a descendant of one of the oldest families in Virginia.

The only surviving members now, however, were himself and his daughter Eunice. The latter was a very beautiful young girl.

Will was very willing to accompany the scout, for he was anxious to meet Mr. Rigby himself. He was an old school friend of his father's.

So they made their way down toward the star of light. It was not long before they reached the fields and soon were in sight of the great plantation house.

A dog barked and a couple of negro field hands ran out to meet them. As soon as Peterson made himself known they led the way toward the house.

In a few moments they had reached the porch and ascended it. A man of splendid physique and dressed in planters' costume sat there. He arose as the visitors came onto the porch.

"Mr. Rigby," said Peterson, "I have come back to see you upon an important matter."

"I am pleased to see you," said the planter. "I wish that I could furnish your men with supplies, but, to tell the truth, the Union raiders have taken everything."

"We have not come upon such an errand," said Will courteously, "though, if you had anything of the sort to sell, we would buy."

"Are you Captain Prentiss?"

"I am."

"I am glad to see you," said the planter warmly. "Peterson has told me about you. Also, I know your father well."

"The pleasure is mine," replied Will. "I have often heard my father speak of you."

"Yes, Jeff Prentiss and I were schoolmates," said Rigby. "Ah, it was a sad day when we parted, each to go his way in life. He is fighting for the Confederacy, while I am kept at home by the gout."

"We have come to obtain information of you about the region north of us," said Peterson.

"Indeed! Well, the best and the worst that I can say is that it is in the hands of the Yankees. They are everywhere. Between here and Alexandria there are thousands of them."

"Do you know our mission in this region?" asked Will.

"No."

"We are commissioned by General Beauregard to make a demonstration in Colonel Benson's rear, so that his attention might be diverted while an attack was made in his front. I am trying to get around his flank."

The planter gave a great start.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed. "I fear you can never do that. Benson's line of communication has a very formidable defence."

"Yet we must cut it."

The planter was silent a moment. He looked at his two visitors in amazement.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUPLICITY OF A RASCAL.

It was plain that Thomas Rigby did not have much faith in the project which the Virginia Grays were essaying.

"I wish you success," he said. "But I fear it will be a difficult thing for you to do."

"We shall make the attempt."

"I wish I could assist you."

"Perhaps you can later on."

"By the way," said the planter suddenly, "you are not long from Manassas."

"No."

"Can you tell me if Lieutenant Percy Wadley, an attaché of General Beauregard's staff, is yet there?"

Will and Peterson gave a start at the mention of the spy's name. They looked at each other questioningly.

"Do you know him?" asked Will.

"Certainly," replied the planter. "He is the fiance of my daughter Eunice, though I will not allow her to marry him until he has earned a sufficient competence to support her."

This was a startling revelation to Will Prentiss and Peterson. They were for a moment dumbfounded.

"Well," asked the planter finally, with impatience, "can't you give me an answer? Do you know him?"

"We do," replied Will.

"Very good! What about him? Is he not still on Beauregard's staff?"

"I—don't think so!" replied Will hesitatingly.

They had accepted seats on the porch. The planter had bent a keen searching gaze upon them there in the gloom. He could not see the lines of their faces, else they might have been a revelation to him.

The planter's manner changed. He drew his chair nearer and lowered his voice:

"Gentlemen," he said in a serious tone, "I am going to say to you what I would not have said a few weeks ago to any living person. My daughter is engaged to this man wholly against my will. At times I have thought I was unnecessarily harsh with her and with them both. But I have never liked him."

"Now, to my ears have come rumors regarding his character which have given me a shock and caused me to regard him with great suspicion. I wish only to confirm those suspicions to save my daughter from an awful fate. For if Percy Wadley is what I am bound to believe him, I would rather see her in her grave than married to him."

For some moments after the planter had ceased speaking there was a dead silence.

Neither Will nor Peterson could for a time bring themselves to speak. Finally, however, Will leaned forward and said:

"Mr. Rigby, I can only say that I would rather say nothing."

"My friend, I beg of you to tell me the truth," persisted the planter. "Remember that I am a father and my love for my daughter is such that it would kill me if harm should come to her."

"Well," said Will slowly, "if I were you, knowing what I do about Wadley, I would advise her to break the engagement."

"Tell me what you know about him. It must be a powerful motive to cause her to break with him."

Will looked at Peterson. The scout nodded and the young captain said:

"I feel that I would be doing wrong not to tell you the truth, Mr. Rigby. We know that Percy Wadley is a traitor."

"A traitor!" The planter's face hardened.

"Yes!"

"You have proof?"

"We have! He has sold secrets of the Confederate Government to the Union. He has been reported to General Beauregard and will, if he returns to Manassas, be placed under arrest."

The planter arose. He was quivering with excitement. "Mose!" he called, and a negro servant appeared. "Send Eunice to me at once!"

"I am here, father!" said a musical voice, and a young girl appeared on the porch. "What do you wish?"

For a moment the planter was so agitated that he could not speak. He stood before her stern and cold.

"Eunice," he said finally, "I have news for you."

"I have heard all," she said calmly, "though I have not played the part of eavesdropper intentionally."

"What have you to say?" asked the planter. "Are you at last satisfied that this young man is deceiving you?"

"I do not believe the allegation against him," she said coldly.

"You do not believe it?"

"No!"

"But—this is Captain Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays, the son of my old friend Jeff Prentiss. His word is beyond question."

"I do not care," she said proudly. "No man's word can turn me against the man I trust and love."

"Now, Eunice—remember you are my daughter——"

"I am painfully conscious of the fact."

"What? That is the first impudent word I ever received from you," cried the planter. "Can I believe my senses?"

"Father," said Eunice Rigby in a deep voice, "I love you, and I have always been a faithful daughter to you. But when you traduce the man I trust and love I cannot bear it!"

"What I say to you is for your own good," declared the planter. "I would save you from a life of shame and unhappiness!"

Eunice Rigby turned to the door to enter the house.

"It is quite useless to discuss the subject further," she said. "No word these men bring can change me. I still have faith in Percy Wadley."

All this while Will and Peterson had stood respectfully by. But just at that moment the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard. A rider dashed up and alighted at the porch.

A negro boy was at hand to take the horse. The rider sprang up the steps and a moment later stood revealed in the glare of the hall lamp.

He was tall and straight and not unhandsome in his lieutenant's uniform of gray. But his face was white and haggard.

He did not see Will and Peterson, who stood back in the shadows. He glanced at the planter and then at Eunice.

"Oh, Percy!" cried the young girl, and rushed to his arms.

"Eunice!" he exclaimed as he drew her to him, "I had an opportunity to leave headquarters and I embraced it to come and see you."

"I am so glad, Percy!" she said. "Now you may refute the vile slander uttered against you!"

"Slander!" exclaimed Wadley.

"Yes!" she said, turning confidently to her father. "Now, let us see if those men will dare make the charge to his face!"

It was plain that her confidence in Wadley was unbounded. She faced them like a queen. But Wadley gave a little start, and his hand sought his sword hilt.

It was a dramatic moment. But Will quickly stepped to the other side of Wadley, while Peterson got upon one side.

When the traitor recognized them his face grew livid and he half turned as if to flee.

But Will Prentiss held out the point of his sword and said sternly:

"Don't try that game, Wadley! You cannot get away!"

"What do you mean?" he demanded with an affectation of anger.

"You know well enough! You are a traitor to the Confederacy. You have sold the secrets of General Beauregard's plans to the enemy."

"It is a lie!"

"It is the truth!"

"Who are you?"

"I am Will Prentiss, of the Virginia Grays. I saw you meet Colonel Benson in the hut of old Nance, the negress. You cannot get out of it, Wadley. You know it."

Wadley, with ghastly pallor and trembling, could not speak. The planter stood like a statue watching his daughter.

She, white as death and rigid, stood looking at her lover. Her faith was still unshaken.

"Tell them that they lie, Percy!" she said. "I do not believe them. I have faith in you!"

She took a step nearer. But he was now bathed in cold sweat. There was a light of terror in his eyes. He could not answer her.

For a moment she waited. Then the expression of her face began to change. She bent forward searchingly:

"Why don't you speak, Percy? Why don't you deny it?"

"I—I did it for you," he groaned. "I could get you no other way. I needed money. The pay of a lieutenant is nothing. I expected to get thousands of dollars for it. They deceived me. I was made a victim of their shrewdness."

For a moment Eunice Rigby stood there looking at him. Then her manner seemed to undergo a change.

She drew back slowly. Her father held out his arms and she went to them. With a gasp, she laid her head upon his shoulder.

Wadley took a step forward.

"Eunice, you'll not desert me! I did it for you! Now that I am in trouble you will remain by me. I demand it! You are my promised wife!"

She turned like a flash.

"I was the promised wife of a man of honor, as I deemed, not of a traitor and a villain!"

He shrank back, while an anathema dropped from his lips.

"So you forsake me in my hour of need," he hissed. "I'll have my revenge for this. You shall see. I will even matters with you and your old dolt of a father. I'll humble you! I'll bring you to my knees. I'll have—I'll——"

But Peterson stepped forward and placed a hand over his mouth. Will pinioned his arms behind him.

The villain raved and struggled, but in vain. He could not break away. He was a prisoner.

The girl he had hoped to win and of whom he was in no sense worthy passed into the house on her father's arm. He was dragged from the porch.

Will and Peterson, with their prisoner, now set out for the camp of the Grays. They were elated with his capture.

They knew that ere this he was a fugitive from the Confederate camp, with a price upon his head.

Presently the villain quieted down and his manner changed. He began to simper and wheedle.

"For the love of heaven, don't take me to Manassas!" he begged. "Beauregard will hang me! He will show me no mercy! Let me live! I beg you to let me live!"

"I am sorry, Wadley," said Will. "You ought to have thought of all this before. The man who is a traitor to his country deserves but little mercy."

"Oh, I beg you to spare me," whined the scoundrel. "Don't take my life. Let me live!"

"Have courage," said Will. "You will have a fair trial."

In vain the fellow begged and pleaded. He sank down upon his knees and actually refused to walk.

But Peterson touched him once or twice with the point of his hunting knife and overcame this trouble.

They had now reached a path which led along the hill-side to the camp of the Grays. Suddenly out of the gloom sprung a number of figures.

"Halt! Who goes there!" was the ringing cry. "Surrender in the name of the Union!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A DANGEROUS GAME.

There was not an instant to lose. Neither Will Prentiss nor Peterson had any hopes of escaping with their prisoner now.

In fact, their attention was instantly engrossed by the new contingency so unexpected and so startling.

Armed figures burst from the gloom. Out came Will's sword and Peterson picked up a heavy fence rail. They leaped to one side and Peterson swung the rail like a flail.

Down went two of the foe. Will's sword crossed over the bayonet of another and wounded him in the shoulder. Then the two Confederates leaped back into the bushes.

The gloom aided them. They were able to save themselves, but lost their prisoner.

Through the underbrush they ran at full speed until the sounds of pursuit died out in their rear. Bullets had whistled all about them.

They flung themselves down finally, breathless and exhausted. They were far on the other side of the ridge, for they had been careful not to lead the pursuers toward the camp of the Grays.

"Whew!" gasped Peterson as he sank into a heap of underbrush. "That's the hardest run I've had for many a day!"

"Same here!" exclaimed Will. "I couldn't go much further."

"Nor I!"

"What awful luck! We have lost Wadley!"

"Well, I should say! I felt sure that we had the traitor."

"So did I!"

For some time they lay there, listening and waiting. But it was plain that they had eluded the enemy. For the nonce at least they were safe.

After they had finally recovered their strength they crept out of the underbrush. For a moment they were at a loss to know just where they were.

But, finally, the scout located their position and said:

"We are a mile right over the ridge from camp. What shall we do?"

"Return to camp at once. It will be a wonder if the Grays are not discovered before we get there."

"That is true."

So at once they set out for the camp. Peterson led the way with powerful long strides. It was with difficulty that Will kept up with him.

But they kept on until they had reached the other side of the ridge.

Then suddenly surprising sounds smote upon their hearing. It was the distant rattle of firearms.

A great blaze of light was seen against the cliff side. In an instant the horrible truth of the thing burst upon Will and his companion.

"My soul! They are attacked!"

There could be no doubt that the Grays were embroiled in a night attack. The thought gave Will a chill.

He realized how necessary it was that he should be on the spot. With great excitement he rushed on.

Even the scout could hardly keep up with him. On they went at a tearing pace.

But, as they went on, the light grew dim and the firing became desultory and seemed to recede.

"They are retreating," said Peterson. "There is no doubt of that."

"Do you believe it?"

"It can be nothing else."

"Well," said Will with relief, "that is better than capture. But what force can have attacked them?"

"Perhaps the party who attacked us are the same. Or at least a part of the same force."

"That means that Union troops have moved up about Rigby's under cover of darkness."

"Just so!"

They pushed on now, until finally Peterson bolted and said:

"We are within three hundred yards of the spot where the Grays were camped. I see no camp fires."

"Nor no sign of the enemy either."

"No."

"Let us walk down nearer."

This was done until they finally came upon the ashes of the camp fires. The Grays had got out hastily. This was easy to see.

Will and Peterson were now in a quandary. Of course, there was only one thing to do, and this was to follow on until they should be able to overtake the Grays.

"What were your orders to Randolph?" asked the scout.

"I gave him no special orders. I left everything to his discretion."

"Good! I have confidence in Randolph. I have no doubt he will before he gets through wiggle the boys out of the scrape. It don't look feasible for us to follow this trail just now. We are apt to stumble upon the Union forces and be captured."

"What have you to propose?" asked Will.

The scout was reflective.

"Well," he said finally, "there is a plan which we might work, but it will require sharp work."

"What?"

"You can see that there are a number of Union dead lying about here."

"Yes!"

"We can remove a couple of uniforms from them and put them on over our gray uniforms. Then we will penetrate to Rigby's and see what is going on. Perhaps even recapture Wadley."

Will hesitated but a moment. The feasibility of the plan seemed great. It took him but a moment to make up his mind.

"Good!" he cried. "We will do it."

"You agree?"

"I do!"

"It will be sharp work. There will be a great risk of discovery."

"One of the chances of war. I am ready when you are."

By the dying embers of a campfire Peterson removed the uniforms from a couple of dead Union soldiers.

He at once donned one himself. He was of a type common among the Northerners and was an accurate Yankee. Will now proceeded to do the same.

The two Confederates now felt comparatively safe. They knew that they would hardly be questioned as Union soldiers. If they were captured by the Confederates they could simply make known their identity.

They now set out for the Rigby plantation. They could see from the ridge that campfires blazed all around it, sure evidence that the Union troops had made headquarters there.

To learn what the strength of the force was and what was its purpose was now the object of the two disguised Confederates. Whatever plans the future would hold might evolve from this very same ruse they were working.

It was not long before they once more came down to the wheat field. They were hailed by a sentry.

"Who goes there?"

"A good Union soldier. I want to join my company!" replied Peterson. "Let us through the lines!"

"I am sorry," said the guard, "but I can't do it without the countersign."

"We have none."

"Then you cannot pass."

"But by our uniforms you should know."

"Yes, I know many who wear the blue. No doubt you are all right. But I have my orders and they must be obeyed."

The sentry spoke firmly, and Will and Peterson were for a time in doubt what to do. They retired some distance to consider.

"What shall we do?" whispered Will. "We cannot force a way by the guard."

"No! But perhaps we can slip by at an unobserved moment."

The scout looked up at the sky. Will did the same. The light of dawn was just breaking.

In a few moments darkness gave way to a gray light. They sat down upon the ground and waited.

Just then the music of drum and fife was heard. Up the lane came a regiment of Union soldiers.

In an instant Peterson caught an idea.

"Come on, captain!" he cried. "I see a way to overcome the difficulty."

In a few moments they had taken up a position down the lane. The Union regiment came on with swinging step.

Peterson caught the eye of one of the captains and said:

"We've lost our regiment. What shall we do?"

"Fall in, boys!" said the captain with a wave of his sword.

In an instant they were in the ranks. They passed the guard thus without question. In a short while the regiment stacked arms before the Rigby house.

Will and Peterson did not linger with the regiment. They quickly stole away and were soon lounging about the porch of the mansion.

And as they did so they saw Thomas Rigby on the upper porch. The planter's face was dark and careworn. His troubles were many, with this legion of soldiers quartered upon his premises.

As Will and the scout watched him they suddenly saw him start up and his face became swollen with passion.

He glared at some one who had just crossed the lawn and was ascending the porch. They saw his hands clench and he half-rose from his chair.

Instinctively they turned to see who was the object of this emotion and both gave a start.

It was Wadley.

The traitor, with head erect and a cynical smile upon his lips, strode up the steps of the porch. He entered the house and was lost to sight.

Then Rigby sank back in his chair. As he did so, though, he glanced at Will. The boy captain, forgetting himself, was looking straight at him.

Rigby gave a start, knitted his brows and stared at Will eagerly. Then there was a mutual glance of recognition.

Surprise showed in the planter's face. He rubbed his eyes and arose again. He went to the rail of the piazza.

But Will put a finger to his lips and turned away. The planter nodded and, turning, went into the house.

The acute gaze of the scout had taken it all in.

"He recognized you!" he said.

"Yes."

"Do you think it is well?"

"I could not help it," said Will. "We must make the best of it."

Just then the planter appeared in the lower door of the house and walked out.

Soldiers were in knots upon the lawn. Officers lounged and smoked upon the lower piazza.

The sun was now up, and the Union soldiers would soon be called to review. The planter walked carelessly down upon the lawn.

He made a slight sign with his hand as he passed Will and Peterson. Then he vanished behind the big mansion.

"That was for us," said Peterson.

"Yes."

"He wants us to follow him."

So they presently walked carelessly in that direction. On the other side of the mansion was a summer house.

In the door of this stood the planter. He affected not to notice the two as they approached.

But there were no soldiers on that side of the house. In a few moments the two disguised Confederates were beside him.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

"What does this mean?" asked the planter in a low tone.

"What are you doing here?"

"We are looking for Wadley," replied Will.

"For Wadley?"

"Yes!"

"How did he escape you?"

"We were set upon by the vanguard of this regiment last night. We only escaped with our lives."

"Ah, I see! Wadley is known to them and has his freedom. Do you know it?"

"Yes!"

"But these uniforms——"

Will unbuttoned his coat, showing the gray underneath.

"They are simply a disguise," he said. "We shall hope to wear them only long enough to carry out our purpose."

The planter's face cleared.

"I see," he said. "I hope Beauregard will soon awaken to the fact that we need protection in this region, and he must send troops enough to drive these interlopers out."

"I think that he will do so!"

"Well, I hope he will. There are really but a few regiments that are doing all this thing. They are living on a few of us planters and raiding the whole country. In fact,

I know that through Wadley there is a game afoot to drive our troops out of Manassas."

"That can never be done!"

"It will be done if they can swing their heavier column around to the right flank of our army."

"Oh, but Beauregard already has word of this game!"

"Who has taken it to him?"

"My sister Nell," replied Will. "She has carried the news to him ere this!"

"What, little Nell Prentiss? She went to school with my Eunice."

"Yes."

"I can't believe it possible. She is but a young girl and knows nothing of war."

"Do not be deceived," said Will with a smile. "She is the cleverest female spy in the employ of our government."

"This is astonishing news to me. Really I am surprised. But I know what the Prentiss blood is. Well, if this is so, Beauregard ought to be able soon to give us the needed relief."

"I think he will!"

"To come down to present matters, I am at present very much worried about my daughter Eunice."

"How is that?" asked Will.

"She is nearly prostrated from the effects of the blow she has just received. She had unbounded faith in Wadley. He has proved a great miscreant."

"We are very sorry. It was better for her to know the truth, though."

"Most certainly. I am now in deadly fear, though, for her safety."

"Her safety?"

"Yes."

Will and Peterson stared at the planter in amazement. He nodded slowly and then went on:

"Yes, I mean what I say. It will be easy for you to understand when I tell you that Wadley is at present literally in power here."

"I don't understand that," said Will.

"Well, it is true! Colonel Chapin, the commander of this regiment, is thoroughly under his thumb. You see, Wadley has a paper signed by Benson, requiring every other officer of his expedition to show Wadley all possible courtesy."

"Indeed!"

"Now Chapin is an irresolute, weak sort of a man and much given to drink. He is not of a high order so far as morals go. Hence Wadley, I believe, thinks he can carry out designs against my daughter."

"I don't understand!" said Will in surprise. "What designs can he possibly have?"

"He has already hurled a threat at me to forcibly abduct Eunice if she did not fulfill her promise to marry him."

The planter's voice quavered. It was plain that he was much agitated. Will and Peterson listened with wonderment.

"That's all right," said Will finally. "But how does the scoundrel think he can do that? Surely no Union officer

of the rank of Chapin would stoop to implication in such a thing."

"Don't you believe it," said the planter with a shake of his head. "Chapin is capable of anything. I think he is as big a villain as Wadley and they are hand in glove."

There was a moment of silence. Will Prentiss was reflective. Peterson, the scout, finally said:

"I think the best thing you can do is to send your daughter away to some distant point."

"That is all very well!" agreed the planter. "But it is now too late."

"Too late?"

"Yes. It is only an hour since she was refused passage by the guard. The order is to keep her in the lines. You can understand what that means!"

Peterson gave a little exclamation. Will Prentiss looked startled.

"I see!" he said clearly. "Your fears are well-founded. You must have help. Eunice must in some way be smuggled outside these lines, else the worst will befall her."

"There is the point," groaned the planter. "Oh, is there no way in which you can give me help?"

Will held out his hand.

"Yes," he said. "You shall have help. My friend here and myself will undertake to rescue your daughter."

"God bless you!" whispered Rigby. "If you will do this for me, you will earn a father's blessing."

"It will be a pleasure, as well as our duty," said Will. "Where is Miss Eunice now?"

"She is in her room. She is very loath to leave it."

Will paced up and down a moment. Then a brilliant idea came to him.

"I have a plan," he said.

"What is it?"

"You see that we are now in Union uniform. We are unsuspected by the other soldiers here."

"Yes."

"Very good! We will wait here at this rear door. Your daughter shall appear and we will simply walk away with her beyond the picket line."

The planter's face fell.

"That is not possible!"

"Why?"

"Every sentry is posted. Every man in this regiment is bound to keep an eye on her. She could not go beyond the lines."

"Is that so," said Will quietly. "Let us see how this will do!"

He drew a piece of paper from his pocket. On it with an ink pencil he wrote as follows:

"Pass the bearer and lady through the lines. This order will hold good until it is rescinded by special order."

"(Signed) OLIVER CHAPIN, Col. Commanding."

"How is that?" he asked, holding it up.

"A forged despatch!" exclaimed the planter. "That is clever. I don't see how that can fail."

"It will not," declared Will. "Of course we must not be seen by Wadley. Once we are outside the lines, let him pursue us if he dares."

"Aye!" said Peterson, "I think we can lead him a merry chase."

Tears glistened in the planter's eyes. He seized the hands of the two.

"God will bless you for this," he declared. "I can't tell you how truly grateful I am."

"We are pleased to render the service," said Will. "But, let us lose no time. Will you arrange it with Miss Eunice?"

"I will see her now," said the planter. "At the first favorable opportunity she will slip out by the rear. You can then take her in charge."

And so the plan was arranged. Whether it would succeed or not was yet a question.

Will and Peterson were careful not to enter into conversation with any of the other soldiers. Once a sergeant came up to them and said:

"Hello, boys! What are you doing here?"

"We lost our regiment," replied Will. "We shall wait here until we get a chance to rejoin it."

The sergeant glanced critically at the number on their caps and then passed on.

It was not an unusual thing for soldiers to lose their regiments, and even to for a while do service in some other regiment. So Will and Peterson attracted no special notice.

Not for a moment did anyone dream that they were Confederate soldiers.

They carelessly lounged about the rear of the house. When they had donned their Union uniforms they had thrown away their swords and taken up muskets. So they might easily be mistaken for a guard.

It was not long before Will, looking up, saw a handkerchief flutter from a window above. Then he saw for a moment the face of Eunice Rigby.

A few moments later an old negro woman appeared on the back steps of the mansion.

It was old Nance. The two disguised soldiers recognized her at once.

"How did she ever get here?" exclaimed Peterson in surprise.

Old Nance came down the steps. She walked straight toward them.

"Missy am all ready," she said. "She come along in a minit."

Just then the door opened and Eunice Rigby appeared. The young girl was pale, but there was a fearless light in her eyes.

She walked lightly across the yard and in a moment was by the side of the old negress.

She spoke in a low tone to Will.

"I think this is a favorable time. I saw Wadley go across the lawn on the other side of the house."

"Very good," replied the young captain. "We are ready."

The two Confederates shouldered their muskets, and with regular step walked one on each side of the two women.

They passed a number of soldiers. But they received only a cursory glance. They were now quite a ways from the house. Just before them was a hedge.

A moment more and they were behind the hedge. All drew a deep breath of relief.

They could not be seen from the house. The question now was simply that of passing the picket guard.

As it happened this guard was not posted a great distance from the house. He was pacing up and down, and as they approached halted and presented his bayonet to them.

"Halt!" he said with a brisk brogue. "It's the colonel's orders that no women may pass ther loine!"

"We are under orders to take these women outside the line," said Will. "You will allow us to pass."

"Niver a bit. I've got me ordhers."

"See here, my man——"

"I'll call the guard!"

"No, that's not necessary. Here is an order from the colonel commanding. Read it and see!"

Now, as it happened, the Celtic picket was not a scholar. But he was possessed of a certain species of vanity which forbade an acknowledgment of this fact.

He could not read the written order and took it, and holding it upside down pretended to read it.

Will saw the point and winked at Peterson:

"It's an order signed by Colonel Chapin," he said. "Can't you read it?"

CHAPTER X.

A TURNING OF TABLES.

"Av coarse I kin rade it! Do yez think I'm a fool!" said the picket as he placed the forged order in his pocket. "I salute yez, gentlemen. Pass on!"

Will and Peterson saluted. They felt that they were in great luck.

For Will had feared that the order might be questioned and a demand made that it be verified. In that case he would have been badly stuck.

They marched past the Irish picket in a formal manner. When the underbrush hid them some yards away, however, Will and Peterson flung up their arms in comic pantomime. Even Eunice laughed.

"Ma goodness!" exclaimed old Nance. "Yo' done fooled dat Pishman all right."

"That's right," agreed Will. "And its lucky for us that we did. That order might not have satisfied an intelligent picket."

But now it was necessary to put as great a distance as possible between them and the Rigby house.

They had escaped, but were by no means beyond danger. Old Nance assisted Eunice as they ran on.

In this way they kept on until finally they reached the banks of a small creek. A narrow foot bridge crossed it.

Just as Will stepped upon it to cross there was the crack of a rifle from some distant point and a bullet cut the visor of his cap.

Startled, the boy captain sprung back and all sought cover in the bushes.

"Whew! That was a close call," said Will as he looked at his cap. "I wonder who fired?"

"I think, now that we are out of the Union lines, we had better shake these uniforms of blue," said Peterson. "It may be that some of our own boys have fired upon us."

The idea was at once grasped by Will.

"Why, yes," he exclaimed. "I never thought of that. It is more likely to be some of our own men."

The words had barely left his lips when from the bushes across the creek came the hail:

"Come out and surrender, Yanks. We have you surrounded!"

Instantly Will replied:

"Who are you?"

"We are Confederate soldiers."

The boy captain was about to step out when Peterson clutched his arm.

"Wait," he said. "We must be sure of that first. They may be bushwhackers."

Will realized at once that this was quite possible. He stepped back and said:

"Show yourselves. If you are really Confederate soldiers we will surrender."

The next moment a tall figure in gray stepped out of the bushes. Will gave one glance and cried:

"Joe Spotswood! Hurrah! It's all right, Joe! We have found you at last."

Will sprung out of the thicket. For a moment Joe looked at him in doubt as he saw the blue uniform.

Then he gave a great cry:

"Hooray, boys, it's Captain Prentiss back again. Hooray!"

Instantly a cheer went up and from the bushes about rushed the Virginia Grays. Fred Randolph was at their head.

It is needless to say that the meeting was a hearty one.

"I am glad to turn the command over to you, Will," cried the young lieutenant. "I am in doubt as to whether we have done the right thing or not!"

"What have you done?" asked Will.

"Well, I will tell you. When you left camp with Peterson we, of course, awaited your return. Meantime we secured some food from a distant plantation."

"Yes!"

"When you did not come I had thought of sending out a searching party. But just then we were fired upon from the darkness. Union soldiers were all about us. I had no alternative but to order a retreat. We drew back into the hills and soon had eluded the foe.

"But we could not think of leaving you to an unknown fate. We at once decided to return and attack the Union forces at Rigby's, though we knew they outnumbered us.

"While we were considering the move Selby's scouts came in with the news that two hundred mountaineers under Watson were marching toward us. At once we sent them word to join their forces with ours."

"What?" exclaimed Will with delight. "And they did so?"

"Yes."

The young captain was unable to conceal his delight. This was a contingency for which he had not looked. A daring hope arose in his breast.

"That gives us nearly five hundred men," he cried.

"Yes."

"Good! That force will make a respectable showing. We can easily surround Chapin at Rigby's. If we can defeat him we will be able to so effectually menace the rear of Benson's army that we shall carry out Beauregard's plan to a dot. We can sufficiently distract his attention as to assure his defeat, I know."

Certainly the future looked brighter. It is hardly necessary to say that the young captain's meeting with his Boys in Gray was a warm one.

Very quickly Will and Fred discussed the plan of attack.

To the young lieutenant's credit be it said that Captain Prentiss heartily approved of all his plans.

Selby was on the right, and marching around to cut off Chapin's retreat to the hills. Watson's mountaineers were on the left and the Grays made the centre of the line.

They were already within a mile of Rigby's, and their advance must soon be discovered by Chapin's scouts.

Will now took command. At this juncture Eunice Rigby approached him.

"I wish to thank you, Captain Prentiss, for your kind services," she said. "I shall take my leave of you here."

"What?" exclaimed Will in surprise. "Where will you go?"

"Nance knows a safe place at the home of a friend not far from here. I can remain there until all danger is past."

"Very well, Miss Rigby. I would be glad to serve you further."

"I thank you, but I don't think I require further assistance. Shall you advance at once upon the Union camp?"

"I shall!"

"I wish you the best of success!"

"Thank you. I will detail an escort for you."

"I do not think it necessary. I am now beyond the Union lines."

"But the region is infested with bushwhackers and stragglers."

So Will detailed a guard of soldiers who were to rejoin his company later. They marched away with the young girl and the old negress.

The Grays now resumed their advance. They pushed on through the scrub until they came to the open fields.

The distant smoke of the campfires could be seen. Suddenly from the north came the rattle of musketry.

"Selby is in!" cried Fred Randolph. "He has hit Chapin's flank. We must push on faster!"

With a cheer the Grays rushed on. Now they came upon an outpost.

There was a quick sharp fight, and the outpost was driven in. On rushed the advancing Grays.

On over rail fences and across the fields to the picket line. They drove the pickets in and met the fire of Chapin's skirmishers.

"Hurrah!" shouted the Grays as they rushed on now at the double-quick. It was plain that the Union troops were taken wholly by surprise.

It could be seen that there was confusion in their ranks. In vain their officers were trying to rally them.

They were attacked on three sides. They had no means of knowing just how strong the attacking force was.

It looked to them as if they were completely surrounded and must be wiped out by a greatly larger force.

Nobody knew the moral effect of such an attack upon a body of troops better than Will Prentiss.

He could see that the Union forces were upon the point of a panic. Now was the time to strike.

The mountaineers, two hundred strong, were nearer the foe than the Grays. They were coming on resistlessly.

In a few moments they had swarmed down over the rail fences and were entering the fields. The Union troops were massed here and they opened fire.

For a moment the mountaineers faltered. But Will Prentiss led his Grays transversely across the field, and the foe seeing them coming up almost in their rear tried to change front.

But the move was never executed.

The Union troops broke, and disregarding their officers fled panic-stricken. In vain Colonel Chapin rode up and down furiously, trying to check them. They paid no heed to him.

It was at this juncture that the Union colonel expiated his misdeeds of the past. He suddenly reeled in his saddle, flung up his arms and fell dead.

A bullet had struck him full in the breast. The Union soldiers seeing him fall now gave way to a rout.

They could be held no longer in check. With uncontrollable panic they fled down the lane to the highway.

Here they ran into the fire of Selby's men. They turned only to meet the raking fire of the mountaineers.

And behind them were the Grays. The result was that Chapin's regiment was completely defeated.

Whole squads surrendered and laid down their arms. The ground was covered with the dead and wounded.

From his house Thomas Rigby had seen all. As Will Prentiss appeared at the porch he came up.

"I can hardly believe my eyes," he cried. "Is it true that we have defeated them? This is a great day for the Confederacy."

"I am looking to the moral effect upon Benson's column," said Will. "I trust that it will give them consternation."

"So do I! I think it will. But this is so unexpected. I did not look for you back so soon."

"We ran into our boys before we had gone a mile," said Will.

"And my daughter—you have her with you?"

"No, she left us in company with the negress. She said that she would seek a safe hiding place."

The planter's face cleared.

"Nance is loyal," he said. "She will care for her. But what of Wadley, the traitor? You ought to capture him."

Will had kept a sharp lookout for the villain. But he was not to be found.

It was easy enough to understand, though, that he would not tarry in the vicinity or take chances of being captured.

He was doubtless ere this far away from the spot. Will had little hopes of finding him.

The battle was over and another victory had been won.

CHAPTER XI.

LIVELY WORK.

Chapin's regiment had been entirely broken up. Such of it as remained had fled to the hills in a completely disorganized state.

The Rigby plantation was in the possession of the Grays and their compatriots, the mountaineers and Selby's men.

Will Prentiss was recognized by the other captains as the legitimate leader. At once he called Selby and Watson into the house and held a conference with them.

"I think if we can hang together," he said, "we can give Benson much trouble. In fact, I believe it will be possible to cause his defeat."

"We will stand by you, Captain Prentiss," said Watson.

"That we will," cried Selby. "We must not divide our forces. That would be fatal."

"So it would," agreed Will. "Now my plan is to send out men to requisition horses."

"Horses!" gasped Watson. "What do you want horses for? We have no artillery."

"You do not need horses," said Will. "For your men are mounted. But I propose that we mount our men. That will make us more mobile and they will have hard work to catch us. We can then strike a blow at Benson's rear, cut his lines of communication and destroy his supply trains. In fact, defeat him."

"Grand!" cried Selby. "That is a plan to make us famous."

Watson was a little sharp-featured man and noted as being one of the best cavalry men in the service.

"The plan is all right," he said. "I have fifty spare horses with me. I think you can scrape up another hundred by the end of two days."

"Then it shall be done," said Will. "I will name fifty of your men to get the horses."

"Very well," agreed Watson. "We will do our best."

Will felt that they would be safe at Rigby's for a couple of days longer at least. So he posted guards and went into camp at the plantation.

He did not intend to remain longer at Rigby's than pos-

sible. He knew that in time Benson would certainly turn to strike back at him.

By that time he intended to be somewhere else. The horses would enable him to change his base rapidly.

The next morning fifty horses were brought in by the raiders. Before the next afternoon the full number required was secured.

Will now caused his men to discard all heavy accoutrements save their muskets. These were slung across their backs.

The Grays and Selby's men were thus mounted. The young captain had selected a fine thoroughbred for himself.

He sprung into the saddle and cried:

"Now, boys, for victory! We will give the Union men all they want."

With a cheer the five hundred men, led by the Virginia Grays, rode away from the plantation. They were destined to see some lively work.

Before darkness came they were miles away and heading for the Alexandria turnpike. They bivouacked in a little glen where their camp fires could not be seen.

With the coming of day scouts came in bringing thrilling news.

Not three miles distant was the Union guard of a supply train which was intended for Benson.

"Boys," said Will determinedly, "we want to cut that train in two. We will give Benson a shock."

"Hurrah!" shouted the Grays. Away they rode again. It was not long before in topping a rise they saw the train.

A long line of wagons, white covered and drawn by mules, were to be seen. Alongside the train rode armed men.

Will led the way along in the cover of the woods until they were almost upon the rear of the train. Then, with a wild cheer, the boys broke from cover.

The troop went swooping down upon the guards of the train. There was a brief and stubborn resistance.

But the attacking force was too strong, and the Union guards were scattered. The drivers leaped from their seats and fled.

Horses overturned wagons in their fright, and everything became an inextricable mass of horses, men and wagons.

For nearly a mile the wagon train extended over the pike. The Grays swept on with their work of destruction.

The mules were cut loose and scattered. The wagons were overturned and fired. The provisions were destroyed.

There was a large supply of gunpowder that was also destroyed by throwing it into a creek. Several hundred stands of arms were captured.

In less than an hour nothing remained of Benson's supply train but a blazing pile of rubbish.

The next job was to cut the telegraph wires. The boys climbed the poles and cut the wires in pieces. No telegraphic news could reach Washington from Benson.

"Now for the railroad, boys," cried Will Prentiss. "That will finish our job."

With a cheer the cavalcade went sweeping away across the country. The railroad was not far distant.

With a wild dash, the boys reached the embankment. They leaped from their horses and rushed at the rails.

By taking hold of each end of the ties, a line of men would lift and throw over the whole thing, rails and all.

A fire was then built under them and the iron rails twisted until they were no longer serviceable.

The boys were thus engaged when they heard the distant whistle of a train. The engine came into view around a curve.

The engineer saw what was being done and instantly whistled for "down brakes." It was before the days of the air-brake, and every car had to be braked by hand.

The train came to a stop a quarter of a mile away. A number of blue-coated soldiers were seen on the pilot.

They at once opened fire. Some of the mountaineers started along the embankment to give them battle.

But the engineer had by this time reversed his engine and the train began to run back. It soon attained a high rate of speed and vanished beyond a curve.

"Come, boys!" cried Will sharply. "We've done all we can here. To saddle quickly and let us get after some other job."

So they left the railroad. It was now Will's purpose to ride around the other flank of the Union forces and strike whatever blow there he could.

There was no doubt but that this attack upon their rear had been a distinct shock to the Union soldiers. And as the Grays suddenly reached the top of an eminence a startling sound came to their ears.

It was the distant sullen boom of cannon. Selby and Watson looked at Will. The latter nodded and said:

"The game is working well. Beauregard has moved forward."

That this was true after events proved. The Grays were drawn up waiting for the order to advance. Suddenly a warning cry came from Selby.

Bullets pattered all about them. From a distant patch of forest there dashed a body of United States cavalry.

It was easy for Will to guess that word of the Grays' disastrous work had reached the Union colonel. He had sent this detachment of cavalry to investigate.

The captain of the body of cavalry seemed at first determined to attack. But when he saw how strong the foe was he drew rein.

"Changed his mind," said Watson grimly. "Well, he'd better."

With this Watson gave the order for his men to charge. They dashed down to meet the Union detachment like a whirlwind.

There was a terrific collision, a fierce intermingling of men and horses. The hardy Blue Ridge men were expert riders and were desperate fighters. They bore the Union cavalymen back and hurled them into the forest.

In a moment they scattered them like chaff. With a ringing cheer they rode back.

"Now, boys," cried Will, "back over the same ground!"

Away went the detachment, once more crossing the railroad and sweeping down across the highway.

Some five miles away was a small town called Perryville. It was known to be the stamping ground of Benson's rear guard.

A daring thought came to Will. He was flushed with his victories, and it occurred to him to make a dash for Perryville, and if possible disorganize the rear guard.

This might result in the utter demoralization of Benson's army. In fact, it might encompass his defeat.

So Will led the way down the turnpike. Darkness was at hand, but this was what he wanted.

On through the gloom they rode. Suddenly there was a roar and a flash and several of Selby's men dropped from their saddles.

In that instant by the flash of light Will saw and understood it all. A masked battery occupied the roadside.

He was not foolhardy. He had no desire to sacrifice men.

So he gave the order to swing to the right. They were none too soon. The battery flashed and roared again and shells burst in the roadway.

But the Confederate troopers were out of range and shielded by the embankment of the roadway. At once Will gave the order to dismount and the horses were taken to the rear.

Then, lying on their faces behind the roadway, they opened fire on the battery. This position, however, they were forced to abandon a few moments later.

For the gunners depressed their guns and began to tear up the roadway with their shells.

Will, therefore, ordered a flank movement, which placed his men behind a nearby hill. Here he was for a time safe and a consultation was held.

Watson was for charging the battery. But Selby, with his usual caution, said:

"I don't think we ought to risk it. I fear we will lose too many men."

"We can't go on and leave it in our rear," said Watson.

"That may be."

"What is your opinion, Captain Prentiss? We want to go on to Perryville."

It was a moment of doubt for the young captain. He could not at once decide. He had no desire to sacrifice men.

He knew the risk of going on to Perryville and leaving the battery in his rear. For a time he was in doubt.

Then he said:

"Gentlemen, you are not afraid to follow where I will lead?"

"No," cried Watson. "Hang me if I am!"

Selby hesitated only a moment.

"Where you go I will go," he said.

"Very good!" cried Will. "Order the Grays to the front, Fred. We will take that battery or die!"

The spirit of the young captain seized upon the others. In an instant the order was being given.

The Grays rushed to the front instantly. The line formed just under the brow of the hill.

It was necessary to charge across some broken ground and up a rather steep eminence. Once under the eminence, the guns were ineffective, for they could not be sufficiently depressed.

So as Will gave the word he leaped in front of his men. He knew well the risk he was taking. He knew that he was rushing right into the jaws of death and could hardly hope to return.

Yet there was a chance. This he was ready to accept. He was of the stuff of which heroes are made,

The young captain waved his sword aloft and shouted:

"Forward, Grays! For Virginia and the Confederacy! Forward!"

With a wild cheer the boys rushed forward. On they went down the slope to the roadway.

Boom! Crash! The battery spoke loudly. Shot and shell came tearing into their ranks. The Grays wavered, but reformed and kept steadily on.

Now they reached the broken ground. The fire from the battery was awful to face. On they went.

The mountaineers broke and fell back. Selby's men were almost in a rout. But Will Prentiss, bearing seemingly a charmed life, was in front of his men.

Across the broken ground they rushed. Their ranks were torn, but they kept on. Now they were under the muzzles of the guns. A few seconds more and they were at the top of the eminence.

With one wild cheer they were among the gunners and plying the bayonet. The battery was theirs.

Selby's men and the mountaineers now rallied and came to the front. But the fight was over.

Cheer after cheer went up from the Grays. The Union gunners had fled in wild dismay.

More than a dozen of the brave Grays had been left on the field. As many of Selby's men and a number of the mountaineers were killed.

It was a costly victory.

But Will knew the folly of lingering in the vicinity. He caused the guns to be spiked and dismounted from their carriages.

Then they retreated to the spot where they had left their horses.

They mounted quickly, and once more with a wild cheer rode away down the turnpike toward Perryville.

Not far ahead its lights were seen. It was but a hamlet boasting of a dozen houses and a church. The camp fires of the Union rear guard could be seen.

It was a desperate chance the Grays were taking in this dash upon Perryville. It might result in a brilliant victory. It was more apt to result in a deadly defeat.

But still they kept on. The lights grew plainer every moment. Suddenly there was a loud hail:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends of the Confederacy!" shouted Will. "Death to her foes!"

The picket guard was scattered and the cavalcade went thundering into the Union camp.

Crack! Crack! Bang!

The rattle of muskets and the roar of a field piece smote upon the air. A moment more and the Grays were in the streets of Perryville. The Union troops were rushing to arms and trying to form. It was a wildly exciting moment.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE CAMPAIGN.

That dash into Perryville was long remembered by those who took part in it. In all the annals of the war's most daring deeds few instances are there of a more seemingly foolhardy act than this wild dash of the Virginia Grays.

They were in the presence of many times their number. But the very recklessness of their charge was their salvation.

Will's quick eye traversed the lamp-lit streets. He saw at once that most of the Union troops were in their tents.

A battery of field pieces commanded the street. Before they could be manned they were captured. Horses were

hitched to them and they were hurried away at terrible speed for the turnpike.

The caissons were filled with ammunition and all ready to use. The Grays swept down through the one street of the town and into the tented field. Here, however, they were met by a heavy fire.

The Union troops were forming. Will saw this and swung his column along the edge of the field and back through the street. Out of the town thundered the raiders.

At the bridge over the creek they drew rein by Will's orders.

The guns they had captured were here drawn up in line. The cavalymen had shotted them and now began to open fire on the town.

Hot shot and grape and cannister were sent down the street and among the tents. But a great column of blue was seen coming to the charge.

Will knew the folly of trying to hold his position. So he gave the order:

"Spike the guns! Sound the retreat!"

The guns were spiked. Then they were rolled into the creek. Every man sprung to his horse and they were off like a whirlwind.

Through the night they rode until they were sure that they had reached a safe distance. In a clearing in the woods they came to a halt.

Will ordered a bivouac, and then, rolling himself up in his blanket, flung himself upon the ground and went to sleep.

It is hardly necessary to say that all were glad to follow his example. In a short time the camp was silent.

The horses were cared for as well as possible. There was some chance for grazing nearby.

When Will awoke it was long after sunrise. The camp was quickly astir.

The camp kettle was missing, for they had been compelled to ride with light equipments. The rations were scanty.

In fact, they had been so all through this campaign. The boys were growing lean and haggard.

But their spirits were high. Certainly the campaign had been a glorious one.

From the information brought in by scouts it was known that Beauregard had driven Benson.

He was falling back rapidly. The knowledge that a foe was in his rear must indeed be demoralizing.

Will felt much elated. He believed that he was carrying out Beauregard's orders strictly and doing his country a great service.

And this was gratifying to him beyond all expression.

He was now undecided just what move it was now best to make. He had broken the line of communication for Benson and destroyed his supply train.

He saw no recourse for the Union colonel, but an inglorious retreat and an ignominious defeat.

The boys were soon in saddle and ready for the day's ride. Will gave his horse the spur and rode in advance.

Across the country they dashed once more. Afar off the thunder of guns was plainly heard.

And now, down through a cleft in the hills, they saw a line of blue surging. Will gazed upon it with mingled emotions.

"The retreat has begun," he said.

A grim smile played about his lips. Then it faded and a softer light came into his eyes.

"It is too bad," he said, softly. "Those poor fellows must feel bad to think that defeat is their portion. While we are cheering they are dying. Ah! war is terrible!"

"That is right, captain," said Peterson, the scout, who stood nearby, "but it is the way of human-kind. It always was and it always will be so."

"That is true, Peterson. It is sad to think of, though."

"Indeed it is!"

Will could have sent his men down to pick off many of these retreating soldiers at long range. But he did not do so.

That was not his method of warfare. It savored far too much of bushwhacking, a practice he justly abhorred.

So he watched the blue column for a while. Then he gave the order to ride north to another cut in the hills.

"If I see a chance to capture Benson, I will do it," he said. "He will hardly remain behind."

So the Grays rode on until finally they reached the base of the little range of hills. Just as they got there down the highway came a shuffling figure.

It was an old negress, and she was waving her arms and screaming frantically to Will.

"Oh, massy, Lordy! Fo' de Lor's sakes, massa. Yo' must help mah po' missus. She am in trubble! Yo' mus' help her."

"Old Nance!" gasped Will. Then his eyes flashed with sudden comprehension. In a moment he had reined his horse alongside her.

"What is the matter, Nance? What is all the excitement? What is wrong?"

"Oh, massa! I done remember yo! De po' missy am found out by dat bad man Wadley, an' he am gwine fo' to take her away again."

"Wadley!" exclaimed Will with a hard note in his voice. "Where is he?"

"Ober yonder, sah, in dat house by de co'nah, sah! It am old Missy Primes' house, an' she am de aunt of my missy."

Will turned and spoke sharply to his men. They at once deployed so as to surround the house.

Then he rode up to the door and dismounted. As he did so he saw a rough-looking fellow of the guerrilla type slip out of the door.

"Stop!" he said, covering him with his pistol. "You cannot pass here!"

"I'm all right!" the fellow whined.

"You are all wrong. I'll hang you to the nearest tree. Who is in the house?"

"The lieutenant, sir!"

Will passed by the guerrilla. He saw that horses were in a shed nearby. He flung open the door of the house.

In an instant a pistol was thrust into his face and a harsh voice exclaimed:

"Die, you cur! I'll even matters with you now."

In that brief instant of time Will Prentiss believed that his end had come. The sickening sense of horror which for a moment froze his soul, quickly passed, however.

Joe Spotswood had been right behind Will. As the pistol was thrust into Will's face he saw the leering countenance of Wadley behind it.

The hammer fell and the cap exploded. But for some reason the weapon did not explode.

It was the young captain's salvation. A blow of Joe Spotswood's hand sent the weapon flying many feet away.

The daring young sergeant went through the door like a shot.

Wadley found himself instantly engaged in a deadly struggle with Spotswood. It was fierce while it lasted.

But it lasted only a few moments, for from the interior of the cottage there rushed half a dozen armed men of the bushwhacker type.

They struck Joe a stunning blow in the face and hurled him back. Wadley drew a knife and made an effort to reach him.

But Will now leaped forward and gave Wadley a terrific blow on the head. The villain went down.

"Kill him!" he shrieked. "Shoot him. Don't let him live!"

The bushwhackers hurled themselves upon the young captain. Had Will and Joe been alone they would certainly have been finished.

But at this moment a dozen of the Grays reached the door. They sprung upon the guerrillas like tigers.

The fight was short and sharp. It could have but one result.

Wadley and his men were at once overpowered and made prisoners. The traitor was overcome with terror.

"I am a prisoner of war," he cried. "I am in the United States service. I will be exchanged!"

"You are a traitor and shall meet a deserving fate," said Will sternly.

The interior of the cottage presented a strange scene. It showed how near the villain had come to carrying out his plans.

In a chair sat an aged woman bound hand and foot. Beside her in another chair was a man of feeble age also bound.

They were Mr. and Mrs. Charles Prime, respectable country people, and Eunice was their niece. She had sought refuge there with old Nance after escaping from the Rigby house.

By the fireplace, however, was the most thrilling scene. Bound to a post which supported the ceiling was a man of clerical garb. His face was white, but calm, and there was an exalted light in his eyes.

He was a minister, as could be plainly seen. Before him on a small stand was a prayer book.

Before him and tied in a heavy chair was a young girl of rarest beauty, but pale and ghastly. Eunice Rigby it was, and at sight of her rescuers she fainted.

The whole dastardly plot was plain.

The villain had captured a minister of the gospel and brought him to the cabin with the intention of forcing him at the pistol's point to speak the words which would weld the bond between himself and the girl he loved.

Just in time Will Prentiss and his Grays had arrived to thwart this purpose. With a quick step forward will drew a knife and cut the bonds of all the prisoners.

He lifted Eunice in his arms, but she had already come out of her faint. She struggled from his embrace and gasped:

"Heaven answered my prayers! I am saved! I am grateful to you, Captain Prentiss!"

"The Father is merciful!" said the reverend prisoner, as he raised his hands. "May He bless you all!"

Mr. and Mrs. Prime were happy indeed that rescue had arrived. With true Southern hospitality they proceeded to make the young captain and his Grays welcome.

So strongly did Prime insist that the little company encamped in the yard and partook of a little barbecue of roast pig and a young beef creature, which Prime ordered his negro servants to prepare.

The boys were hungry and more than willing to accept the invitation. They partook of the savory meat and cheered Farmer Prime to the echo.

All around it was a most happy occasion. But Eunice Rigby asked Will: "What will you do with Wadley?"

"I ought to hang him!"

"You will not do that?"

"No," replied the young captain. "I shall take him down to Manassas and turn him over to Beauregard."

"That is better. He should have a trial. He deserves punishment, for he is a traitor. But he should have fair play."

"And he will get it," declared Will. "Shall you remain here?"

"Yes, I think I shall be safe now. I hear that Benson is retreating and has been forced to abandon his aggressive tactics. My father is now on his way here. We shall go to Richmond till after the war."

"I wish you much happiness," said Will.

"I shall not forget you, Captain Prentiss."

Will went out now and ordered his men to saddle. They rode away much restored by their hearty meal.

A week later Benson had retired to the outskirts of Alexandria. His invasion of Virginia had been a failure.

And down at Manassas the Grays, with Captain Will Prentiss, were the heroes of the hour. They would not, however, claim all the praise, insisting that a fair share should be accredited to Selby and his brave men, as well as Watson and his mountaineers.

"Captain Prentiss," said General Beauregard warmly, "we owe Benson's repulse wholly to the dashing work of you and your Grays in their rear. There was a time when things looked dubious for us. But all is changed now."

For a time Will Prentiss and his Grays remained quietly in camp to reorganize and recruit their ranks. But they were soon ready for another call to active service. How they were called and what their deeds were we will leave to another story.

Wadley, the traitor, was hanged, as he deserved. Thomas Rigby and Eunice went down to Richmond to remain until after the war.

The Boys in Gray's hard campaign was ended. And here let us for a time take our leave of them.

THE END.

Read "OUT WITH GRANT; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE IN TENNESSEE," which will be the next number (9) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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